

CHATEAUBRIAND  
AND HIS COURT  
OF WOMEN



FRANCIS GRIBBLE





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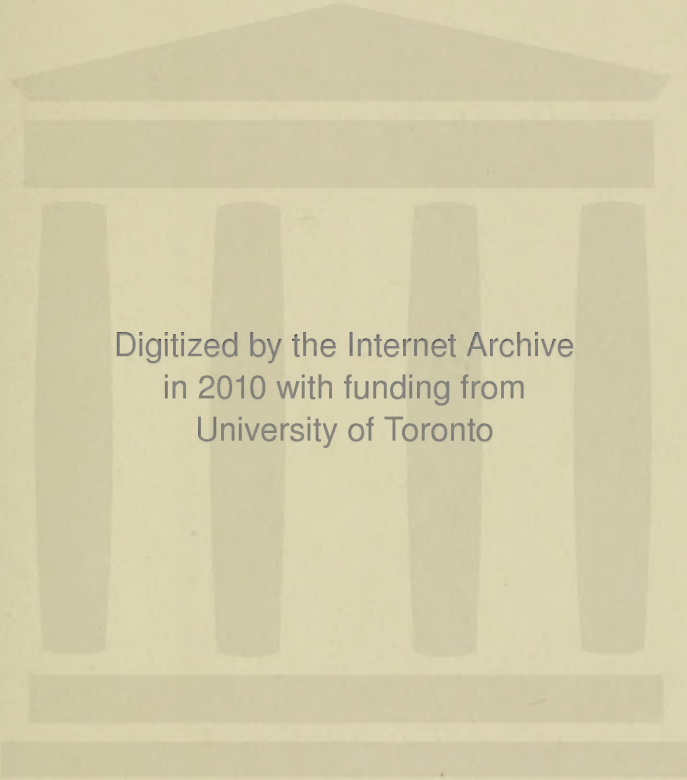




CHATEAUBRIAND AND HIS  
COURT OF WOMEN







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*Chateaubriand.*



# CHATEAUBRIAND AND HIS      ✥      ✥      ✥      ✥ COURT OF WOMEN

BY

FRANCIS GRIBBLE

AUTHOR OF

'MADAME DE STAËL AND HER LOVERS,' 'GEORGE SAND AND HER LOVERS,'  
'ROUSSEAU AND THE WOMEN HE LOVED,' ETC.

*WITH SIX PHOTOGRAVURE PORTRAITS*

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## PREFACE

CHATEAUBRIAND belonged to the small class of great men whose personalities are more interesting than their achievements. He knew it, and was content that it should be so. Any one who desires the proof has only to read his *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*.

It is the greatest of his works—the only one of them which has fully stood the test of time, because it is the only one of them in which we find the genius of the man of letters unaided, and untrammelled, by the cunning journalist's felicitous instinct for the *à propos*. And the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* is only secondarily a chronicle of events. Primarily it is the manifesto of a personality.

Not, indeed, that the events chronicled are without importance—on the contrary. Chateaubriand was an Ambassador, an Envoy Extraordinary, and a Foreign Minister with a policy of his own, who pushed his colleagues, against their better judgment, into a war for an idea—"my war," as he was proud to call it long after the idea for which it was waged had gone the way of all obsolescent conceptions. He was also the most brilliant, and the most influential, of the writers who carried out the work, begun by Rousseau and continued by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, of breaking up the stiff classical prose style of the eighteenth century; and he was furthermore a potent force in stimulating and

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bringing to a head the Catholic reaction which followed upon the dry deism and blatant atheism of the revolutionary and pre-revolutionary periods.

Nor did he under-rate the significance of his successes in any of these fields of activity. He was equally proud of all of them ; but he was prouder still of himself as the source from which they flowed. It has been written that "as Malebranche saw all things in God, so M. Necker saw all things in Necker." It might just as well be written that M. de Chateaubriand similarly "saw all things in Chateaubriand."

Or in René ; for the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* has been well described<sup>1</sup> as "the re-creation of René."

So far as the world of observers was concerned, the heart-searchings, weariness, and disillusion of René had, at the time of the writing of the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*, been thrown into shadow by the dazzling truculence of the pamphleteer and the magnificence of the statesman and diplomatist. The central proposition of the *Mémoires* was that the changes had only been apparent, and that the essential René had persisted through them all—that René, in short, had been the permanent reality, and the rest a shadowy illusion.

And René, of course—there can be no argument about that—was interesting solely as a personality : interesting, that is to say, not for what he did—for he did nothing—but for what he was. He was the "fatal man," born to weariness, divining satiety before he had tasted pleasure, blighted by the disastrous passions which he inspired, oppressed by his irresistible sense of the transitoriness of human things, condemned to regard his life, if not always to conduct it, as a

<sup>1</sup> By Sainte-Beuve.



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magnificent but melancholy pageant, with the grave for its goal, and the goal never hidden from his eyes.

Once, in conversation with a young woman, Chateaubriand said that René was "a perfect idiot"; but the purpose of that remark was probably to suppress an undesired and importunate admirer. Passage after passage might be quoted from the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* to show that Chateaubriand identified himself with René—or rather, perhaps, that he considered his own life to have been the conspicuously realized ideal of which René's life was the instinctive and imperfect adumbration. He used to wonder whether any of the women who passed him in the Park in the days of his obscurity had "divined the invisible presence of René"; and he spoke of the women who loved him in the days of his grandeur and renown as forming a "long funeral procession."

Such, then, was Chateaubriand's personality as Chateaubriand himself conceived it. How far he succeeded in imposing his conception on his contemporaries may be questioned; but even those of them who knew enough about him to feel compelled to make their reservations were deeply interested and almost awe-struck when he asserted himself in his majestic accents. Joubert had called him "the Enchanter" in his youth, and he could still enchant in his old age. At the time when, nearly a septuagenarian, he read his *Mémoires* to the privileged guests in Madame Récamier's salon, he was regarded, not indeed as the greatest, but certainly as the most interesting man in Europe. The proof is in the fact that, when he sold the *Mémoires* for posthumous publication, he got nearly £20,000 for them.

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There is no adequate life of Chateaubriand in any language; and there is no life at all in English. Possible biographers probably avoided the subject because they felt that *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* covered the ground and blocked the way.

The objection might properly be regarded as insuperable as long as biographers had access to no other materials than those which Chateaubriand had supplied. For a long while that was the case; but in recent years a great deal of fresh material has been unearthed and accumulated. Many letters and other documents previously unpublished have appeared successively in M. Raynal's *Les correspondants de Joubert*, in Abbé Pailhès' *Chateaubriand sa femme et ses amis*, in M. Chédieu de Robéthon's *Chateaubriand et Madame de Custine*, in M. Agénor Bardoux's delightful lives of Madame de Beaumont, Madame de Custine, and the Duchesse de Duras, and in an anonymous work entitled *Un dernier amour de René*. The gross inaccuracies in Chateaubriand's narrative of his travels in the United States has been demonstrated by M. Joseph Bédier. M. Anatole Le Braz in the *Revue de Paris* and M. Dick in the *Histoire littéraire de la France* have corrected in several essential particulars his account of his sojourn in the County of Suffolk. Last, but by no means least, M. Léon Séché, in *Les Annales Romantiques* and in his recent monograph on Hortense Allart de Méritens, has brought to light new and hitherto unsuspected chapters in Chateaubriand's career.

It seems to follow that the time has come when a synoptic view of that career may at last be taken with some hope that the resulting picture will at once

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approximate to exactitude, and bring into due relief those romantic episodes in it to which Chateaubriand himself appears to have attached the most importance. What those episodes were may be inferred from the fact that, alike as a pilgrim to the Holy Land and as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, he wrote that his sole ambition was to "win glory" in order that he might "lay it at a woman's feet."

FRANCIS GRIBBLE.

P.S.—Thanks are due to M. Raynal for permission to reproduce the portrait of Mme. de Beaumont; to M. Bardoux for leave to use the portrait of Mme. de Custine; to M. Perrin for the portrait of the Marquise de V——; and to the Société du Mercure de France for the portrait of Hortense Allart de Méritens.

F. G.





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# Chateaubriand and his Court of Women

## CHAPTER I

Chateaubriand's ancestors—His birth—Anecdotes of his childhood  
—Intended for the navy—Throws up his commission and  
returns home.

“I AM of noble birth.”

That is the curt phrase in which François-René de Chateaubriand presents himself to the readers of his *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*. He whose voice reaches them from beyond the grave is no “parvenu,” but a patrician of long and illustrious lineage.

Not that it matters—that is the tone he takes. His descent is an “accident” of which he is too good a philosopher to boast; his family history only interests him as an historian. But he has “nephews” who are not philosophers; and he proposes to set forth the particulars for the satisfaction of their pride and curiosity. He does so, and the particulars fill half a volume—an intricate genealogical tangle through which we need not try to follow him. A few facts selected from it almost at random will suffice to illustrate the ancient glories of the house.

Brient de Chateaubriand fought by the side of the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings—which the

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genealogist dates 1067. A Geoffroy de Chateaubriand fought in the crusades with Saint Louis, and there won by his prowess and bravery a new coat of arms bearing the proud motto: "Notre sang a teint la bannière de France." A Guy de Chateaubriand attended Arthur of Brittany on a special embassy to the Pope in 1309. Chateaubriands had married daughters of the royal houses of France, England, and Arragon, and of such great French houses as those of Brittany, Lusignan, Rohan, Laval, and Du Guesclin. A Madame de Chateaubriand had been the "favourite mistress" of François I until she was superseded in his affections by Madame d'Etampes. Et cetera.

Those honours and achievements, however, belonged to the distant past. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the family—and especially the younger branches of it—fell upon evil days. They brought no more loot home from the wars, and received no more grants from the Crown; and, as their families were large, the constant subdivision of their estates brought them, as it brought many Breton nobles of the period, to poverty. Things were not, indeed, quite so bad with them as with those aristocrats of the province whom Bernardin de Saint-Pierre<sup>1</sup> discovered "working as day-labourers, at harvest-time, for the peasants"; but they were bad enough. René-Auguste de Chateaubriand, who was born in 1718, had to face the world with an annual income of four hundred and sixteen francs.

He was an adventurous youth, resolved, from his earliest childhood, to restore the fallen fortunes of the

<sup>1</sup> The author of *Paul et Virginie*.



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house. His mother besought him to stay at home and "till the land like his forefathers"; but he preferred to go to sea. He served as a volunteer in the force which Cardinal Fleury sent in 1734 to the relief of Dantzic; he was wrecked on the coast of Spain, and saved from the sea only to be robbed by brigands on the land. Then, somehow or other, he found his way to the West Indies, and, somehow or other, made money there;<sup>1</sup> and then, returning to France, he became a ship-builder—a trade in which Louis XIV encouraged noblemen to engage<sup>2</sup>—and continued to prosper. He fitted out many privateers, and the privateers brought many prizes home to port; so that, in 1761, he was rich enough to buy from the Duc de Duras the Château de Combourg, a former seat of the heads of his family.

Meanwhile, in 1753, he had married a daughter of the Comte de Bedée—an old soldier who had fought at Fontenoy; and, in the course of the next fifteen years, ten children were born to him. Four of them died in infancy. The others were Jean-Baptiste, Marie-Anne-Françoise, Bénigne-Jeanne, Julie-Marie-Agathe, Lucile-Angélique, and François-René, the subject of this study, the date of whose birth was September 4, 1768.

The child was father of the man. That is the note struck and sustained throughout those poetical and richly coloured pages of the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* in which Chateaubriand reviews his recollections of his infancy and youth; and it may be that the

<sup>1</sup> Probably in the slave trade.

<sup>2</sup> As a rule noblemen could not engage in trade without forfeiting their nobility.

## Chateaubriand and his Court of Women

accuracy of the picture suffers because the autobiographer can only see himself through his later temperament. He was, when he wrote—or he had been—René. He had plucked many Dead Sea apples, and they had all turned to bitter ashes—or so he was persuaded—in his mouth. He had become a personage. His books had marked an epoch, and women had sighed at his feet. But all—or so he said and thought—in vain. Happiness had always eluded him, and gloom had always haunted him; so that melancholy must have set a mark upon him in the cradle. It was the mood—the frame of mind—which we in England know from Byron; but Chateaubriand always affirmed that it originated not with Byron, but with him. He gave the world, he insists, Byronism before the letter; and therefore he looks back upon his childhood and finds that it was Byronic.

“My mother,” he writes, “inflicted life on me”—an echo, whether conscious or unconscious, of Rousseau’s lament over his birth as the first of his misfortunes. He first saw the light on a storm-beaten rock, in the midst of a howling tempest which drowned his infant cries. His godfather was one of the predestined victims of the Terror. “Heaven,” he says, “seemed to unite these circumstances that my destiny might be imaged and foreshadowed in my cradle;” and, in the same way, everything that he did, and everything that happened to him, in childhood, figures in his narrative as a presage and a symbol of the empty glories which fate held in store for him.

He was neglected, he says, and misunderstood. His first playmate was his sister Lucile—a Cinderella

## Chateaubriand and his Court of Women

with no fairy godmother, uncouthly dressed in the others' cast-off clothes. He and she attended a dame school together; and when the dames scolded the little girl for inattention, the little boy flew at them and scratched their faces. It was his first act of chivalry; but his father, when complaint was made to him, only said that the younger sons of the house of Chateaubriand had always been quarrelsome and had never come to any good. Another comrade with whom he got into such mischief as children, left to themselves, ordinarily do get into, was the young Gesril who afterwards died a hero's death at Quiberon Bay.<sup>1</sup> "The link between us," writes Chateaubriand, "was our instinctive sense of the proofs of merit that we were both one day to give;" but, in the meantime, he, like Gesril, and Gesril, like him, was called a good-for-nothing.

At the age of seven, the child was taken to church and vowed, with solemn ritual, to the service of the Virgin. The white robe which he wore for the ceremony was hung up as an *ex-voto* offering on the church wall; and the preacher discoursed of the brave and pious deeds of his ancestor, the crusader. "After listening to the Benedictine's exhortation," he writes, "I never ceased to dream of that pilgrimage to Jerusalem which now, at last, I have accomplished." And then he adds, "The spoils of my innocence were laid upon the altar. Now, alas! it is not my garments but my sorrows which should be hung up as a votive offering in the temple of God."

A little later he was sent to school at Dol; and

<sup>1</sup> In the course of a Royalist raid, supported by England, and intended to raise Brittany.

## Chateaubriand and his Court of Women

there, he tells us, he was sentenced to be whipped for bird's-nesting, but resisted so violently, and protested with such vehemence against the threatened degradation, that those in authority had to bow to his will and substitute another penalty. "And so," he comments, "terminated the first combat in which I defended my honour—that honour which has become the idol of my life, and to which I have so often sacrificed peace, honour and fortune." In another battle for honour his antagonist was a school-fellow. There was a fight, conducted according to the rules, and Chateaubriand was badly beaten, but would not give in. "My cry," he writes, "was that of Jean Demarest on the way to the scaffold, 'It is from God alone that I will deign to ask for mercy.'"

Those are the most typical of the anecdotes which he relates. The note in them is always the same, and always a little forced. The child Chateaubriand is always presented to us as the father of René, obviously predestined to become all that René became: predestined, that is to say, to a pride that could not be broken, to glory and the love of women, and yet to the melancholy of a man of sorrows, to the rarest experiences of all sublime emotions, and yet to the haunting sense of tears in human things. It matters little whether all the stories are quite literally true. They are founded upon fact; and they are artistically true; for the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* which preserves them, whatever it may not be, is at any rate an incomparable work of art.

The profession for which Chateaubriand was intended was the navy. It was to be educated for



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the navy that he was sent to Dol, and afterwards to Rennes, where his old friend Gesril, and the future General Moreau<sup>1</sup> were among his fellow-pupils. "I should have made a good naval officer," he says ; but that is as it may be. The day came, in 1782, when he was ordered to Brest to take up his commission. It had not been made out, and he had to wait for it ; and while he was waiting, something happened to cause him to change his mind. He had dined at mess and had heard ancient mariners talk of their travels and adventures. La Pérouse had been pointed out to him in the crowd. He had gazed in mute admiration at "this later Cook whose death is the secret of the tempests,"<sup>2</sup> and had lain awake all night "fighting imaginary battles and discovering unknown countries." But then he met Gesril again, and "it was written in the book of fate that this young man should exercise an absolute sway over my destiny."

Which means, being interpreted, that Gesril told Chateaubriand that he was going home, and that Chateaubriand decided that he would like to go home, too. No other explanation is even offered. "Seeing," he writes, "that Gesril was about to rejoin his parents, I reflected that there was nothing to hinder me from rejoining mine." And then—

"I should much have liked the naval service if the independence of my temper had not made service of every kind distasteful to me—for it is not in me to obey. The thought of travel attracted me ; but I felt

<sup>1</sup> Napoleon's rival, the victor of Hohenlinden.

<sup>2</sup> The fate of La Pérouse's last expedition remained unknown until the remains of it were discovered by Captain Dillon, in 1827, on the Isle of Vanikoro in Oceania.

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that I should only enjoy it if I travelled alone, wandering in accordance with my own will. And so, thus giving the first proof of my inconstancy, without saying a word to my uncle, without writing a line to my parents, without asking leave from any one, without waiting for the arrival of my commission, I set out one morning for Combours, where I arrived like one fallen from the clouds."

"Voilà une belle équipée," grumbled his father—an old man, too old for energetic anger; while his mother and his sister embraced the returning prodigal.

He had given up the navy, he told them, and proposed to take holy orders; "my real purpose," he explains, "was to gain time, for I did not know what I wanted;" and he was sent to resume his studies at the college of Dinan. Little is recorded of his stay there except that he had a narrow escape from being drowned while bathing in the Rance, and that his school-fellows nicknamed him "Francillon"; and he did not, apparently, remain there very long. His father, for reasons of economy, preferred to have him at home, and his mother acquiesced. He took longer and longer vacations until "by imperceptible degrees" he became "a fixture on the paternal hearth" in the gloomy chateau of Combours.

## CHAPTER II

Early years at Combours—His sister Lucile—Love's young dream  
—Chateaubriand refuses to take Orders—A commission in the  
army obtained for him.

WE find a vivid mention of Combours and its  
chateau in Arthur Young's *Travels in France*—

“To Combours the country has a savage aspect ; husbandry not much further advanced, at least in skill, than among the Hurons, which appears incredible amidst inclosures ; the people almost as wild as their country, and their town of Combours one of the most brutal, filthy places that can be seen ; mud houses, no windows, and a pavement so broken as to impede all passengers, but ease none—yet here is a chateau and inhabited ; who is this Mons. de Chateaubriant, the owner, that has nerves strung for a residence amidst such filth and poverty?”

That was in 1788, when M. de Chateaubriand, the elder, was dead, and the old order was at last on the verge of giving way to the new. The description in the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* belongs to a slightly earlier date, when the imminent fall of feudalism was only foreseen by the discerning—whose number included no member of the house of Chateaubriand, and few, if any, of the Breton aristocrats. To them

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—to the younger as well as to the older of them—it still seemed a matter of course that things would always be as they had always been.

The eldest son was in Paris, pushing his fortune as a soldier. The three elder daughters were married: Marie to M. de Marigny, Bénigne to M. de Québriac, Julie to M. de Farcy. There remained at Combourg only M. and Madame de Chateaubriand, Lucile and René, waited upon by a cook and a housemaid, two footmen and a coachman; and their home was a dilapidated feudal castle, cold and gloomy, like a prison, and so large that “a hundred knights with their dames, their esquires, their serving men, their horses, and their hounds” might almost have been lost and unobserved there.

They lived a lonely, constrained, and inharmonious life. Few visitors came, and only at long intervals. They were ceremoniously entertained for a night, and then rode on to take part in the proceedings of the Breton Parlement at Rennes. For the rest, the family lived alone, without distractions, without any common bond of sympathy, chilled by the self-contained, self-centred silence of its head.

All M. de Chateaubriand's interest in life, it would seem, had been used up in the great task of restoring the fallen fortunes of his house. When that was done, he had nothing left to live for. Wrapped up in his family pride, he was warmed by no family affections. He had not loved his wife when he married her, and it was too late for him to begin to love her now; she and his children were afraid of him. He had his own apartment in a distant corner of the castle; and he sat there for hours, contemplating the emblazoned family



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tree that faced him on the wall. He was a nobleman, and now, at last, having retired from commerce, he was living as a nobleman should. That was his fixed idea—all that he knew or cared about. To that end, he worked—or professed to work—in his study, and made a grave daily inspection of his vegetable garden, and went out, as gravely, and always alone, to fish or shoot on his estate, while his wife prayed, or cried, in the private chapel. She and the children scarcely saw him except at meal-times; and his dreaded daily appearance at the supper-table, in the great hall, is the theme of one of his son's most graphic passages:—

“Supper over, we moved from the table to the chimney corner, and my mother threw herself, with a sigh of relief, on an old sofa of worn-out Siamese cotton. A small table, with a candle on it, was placed beside her. I sat close to the fire with Lucile, and the servants cleared the table and left the room. My father began to pace the room, his walk never ceasing until his bedtime. He wore a ratteen dressing-gown—or rather a kind of cloak which I have never seen worn by anybody else. His head, half bald, was covered with a large white cap which stood up stiffly. The huge hall was so dimly lighted by its single candle, that we could no longer see him when he got to any distance from the hearth, but could only hear his footsteps as he still walked in the dark. Then he returned slowly in the direction of the light, and gradually emerged from the darkness like a spectre, in his white wrapper and his white cap, with his pallid and elongated face. Lucile and I exchanged a few

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words in whispers when he was at the further end of the hall, but relapsed into silence as he drew near again. "What are you talking about?" he asked us as he passed. Stricken with terror, we made no reply, and he walked on again; and, for the rest of the evening, no sound fell upon our ears except his measured tramp, and my mother's sighs, and the howling of the wind outside.

"The castle clock struck ten, and then my father stopped. The same spring which had lifted the hammer of the clock seemed to have arrested his steps. He pulled out his watch and wound it up, picked up a large silver candlestick with a large candle in it . . . and went on his way to his bedroom. Lucile and I waited for him on his way thither, and kissed him and wished him good-night. He bent his withered, hollow cheek towards us, without a word, continued on his way, and withdrew to the depths of the tower, where we heard the doors slam behind him.

"And then the spell was broken. My mother, my sister, and I, transformed into statues by my father's presence, recovered the functions of life."

Speech flowed again, in fact, and the three told each other ghost stories—for the castle itself was said to be haunted by a ghost with a wooden leg—with the result that when the time came for Chateaubriand to escort his mother and sister to their chambers, they always required him to look up the chimneys and under the beds as a precaution against the peril of supernatural apparitions.

Except, indeed, for this unavailing nightly search

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for ghosts, Chateaubriand's life was, for two years or so, almost empty of incident. He sat in his room and read; he rambled in the woods and fields; he exchanged confidences with Lucile; and that was all—or very nearly so. The rest, we must hope and believe, is calumny, though it is not a calumny that can be passed over quite in silence.

The theme of *René*, it will be remembered, is a brother's guilty passion for a sister; and *René* has been read, by some of its readers, as Chateaubriand's own confession of an abnormal and unnatural desire. Decidedly it is no one's fault but his that that interpretation has been put upon the work. He drew himself as René, and he drew Lucile as Amélie; and he dragged the criminal idea into a tale to the central sentiment of which it was not necessary. He handed his enemies, that is to say, the weapon which they employed against him; and one can only answer that his accusers should have been disarmed by the very openness with which he did so.

Not, of course, that one ventures to pretend to know what morbid thoughts stirred, or did not stir, in the mind of a strange and solitary youth, circumstanced as he was and just awaking to the mysterious consciousness of adolescence. Very likely those thoughts were not all altogether healthy. But the guilt of which he wrote was, so to say, "in the air" at the time when he was writing. We find it reflected in other writers—in Shelley, for example; and there are also true stories of the period in which it figures, tricked out almost as romance. A brother of the beautiful Madame Tallien—Notre Dame de Thermidor—killed himself, in the days of the Revolution,

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because he had loved his sister in vain. The story is told in the *Memoirs of the Duchesse d'Abrantés*. Chateaubriand may have heard it, and made literary use of it. One would rather think that than take a view dishonouring to his memory—or even a view dishonouring only to the memory of Lucile.

She was a wild, wayward creature, with streaks of genius, but hardly sane. She was to have her own sad story, of which more shall be said when the proper time arrives ; and it is only because of the many indications of insanity that we find in it that the suggestion referred to has any shade of plausibility. Chateaubriand, on his side, we may be sure, drew only literary inspiration from her. “You should describe it,” she said to him, when he raved to her of the ravishing joys of solitude ; and he who was to become a master of French prose began by writing poetry. Not from Lucile, but from a neighbour's wife, came the first temptation—the dawning perception of the truth to be realized so vividly in the years to come, that it was not good for man to live alone.

It was at one of the windows of the chateau. They had all run to look out of it upon some spectacle in the village street. The boy and the woman were squeezed against each other in the crush. “I knew no more,” he writes ; “but from that moment I realized that to love and to be loved after a fashion hitherto unknown to me was the crowning felicity of life.”

“Another man,” he proceeds, “would soon have come to know the pains and pleasures of the passion of which the germ was in my heart.” But he did not. He dreamed instead, consumed with love for an



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imaginary and ideal woman, on whom he bestowed all the charms of all the beautiful women whom he had ever seen or read of—

“She had the figure, the hair, and the smile of the stranger who had pressed me to her bosom. I gave her the bright eyes of one young maiden in the village, and the fresh complexion of another. The portraits, hanging in our drawing-room, of the great ladies of the courts of François I, Henri IV, and Louis XIV, suggested other traits; and I stole charms even from the pictures of the Virgin in the churches.

“This invisible charmer attended me in all my walks. I conversed with her as with a real human being, and she varied with the variations of my moods. She was Aphrodite unveiled, Diana clad in azure and dew, Thalia with the smiling mask, or Hebe carrying the drinking-cup of youth. Often she became a fairy, brought to me as nature’s gift. I added touches to my picture without ceasing, painting out one charm only to paint in another; and I also altered the jewels that bedecked her, borrowing adornments from all countries, all ages, all arts and all religions. . . . Pygmalion was less in love with his statue than I was with her. . . .”

And so forth; Chateaubriand’s first court of women being a court conjured up by his own extravagant imagination. “I fancy,” he adds, “that the thing is without parallel in the history of the human heart;” but that is the inevitable touch of egoism. For surely—surely——

He lived in these dreams, he tells us, for two years,

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enamoured of solitude and silence. He climbed to the top of the castle towers, and stood there "like Ismen on the ramparts of Jerusalem, invoking the thunder and hoping that it would bring me Armida." Or he wandered in lonely places with his imaginary mistress, picturing himself crossing the seas with her, visiting the ruins of "Venice, Rome, Athens, Jerusalem, Memphis, and Carthage," or "demanding happiness from the palm-groves of Otahiti," or lying to rest on the banks of the Ganges "where the Bengali, leaning against the mast of his bamboo skiff, chanted his Indian barcarolle." Or else he had moods of despair, convinced that his dreams were only dreams to which no reality corresponded; and, in such moods, he thought of suicide. And the outcome of it all was that he fell ill, and was nursed back to life, and confessed that he did not feel called to the celibate ecclesiastical estate.

Assuredly he was not called to it. Perhaps no really great man ever is, for the greatest Churchmen, in France at all events, have not been the most faithful to their vows. Looking back on the decision in after years, he had no illusions on that score.

"On all the more momentous occasions of my life," he writes, "I have always quickly perceived what was the course that I must avoid. My sense of honour has always pushed me in the way that I should go. I saw that as an abbé I should be simply ridiculous. The sacerdotal dignity of a bishop did indeed impress me, and it was with respect that I recoiled before the altar. Should I, as a bishop, I

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asked myself, make strenuous efforts to acquire virtue, or should I be satisfied with the concealment of my vices? I am too weak for the former, too open and candid for the latter, course."

So it was settled. Chateaubriand had refused to be a sailor, and now he refused to be a priest. The only other profession open to a man of his rank was the army. He dreamed, indeed, he says, of "going to Canada to clear the forests," or of enlisting in the service of some Oriental potentate; but his father awoke one day to energy and decision, and summoned his son to his presence.

"Chevalier," he said to him, "there must be an end of all this nonsense. Your brother has obtained you a commission as sub-lieutenant in the regiment of Navarre. You will start for Rennes, and thence you will go to Cambrai. Here are one hundred louis. Be careful how you spend them. I am an old man, and ill, and I have not long to live. Conduct yourself as a man of honour, and do nothing to disgrace your name."

## CHAPTER III

The journey to Paris—Chateaubriand joins his regiment—Presented at Court—The beginning of the Revolution—Risks at Rennes—Acquaintance with Mirabeau—Departure for the United States.

FROM Rennes to Paris Chateaubriand shared a carriage with a milliner, not because he was in quest of adventures, but because a relative had so arranged things for him. The lady was disappointed with him, he says—just as the maid Merceret was disappointed with the conduct of Jean-Jacques Rousseau when she took him for a walking tour. She wondered, he relates, why he kept to his own corner of the conveyance, instead of trying to sit as close by her as possible. Perhaps it was his first foretaste of the successes that were to come; but Madame Rose dropped him at his hotel, “in a hurry to get rid of her fool of an escort”; and so the incident ended.

A Parisian cousin fetched him from his hotel, and took him to call on an unknown Madame de Chastenay. Madame de Chastenay, a late riser, received him lying in her bed, and gave him her hand to kiss, telling him that he was a wild creature, but she would tame him. “But I did not kiss her hand,” he writes. “I withdrew, full of embarrassment;” and that incident was also closed. Chateaubriand was only eighteen, and was still timid.

The coach took him to Cambrai, where he reported

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himself to his colonel, the Marquis de Mortemart. The ascendancy of his character, he says, was such that his brother officers did not venture to "rag" him, though ragging was usual in the French army at that period. He learnt the goose-step "amid the applause of the instructors." His rooms were the favourite *rendez-vous* of his seniors as well as of the subalterns. Already—or so it seemed to him in retrospect—the world was beginning to be his theatre.

Presently the news of his father's death compelled his return to Brittany to assist in the settlement of the family affairs and the division of the family fortune. Accorded a long leave of absence, he spent some months in visiting his three married sisters; but then a letter from his brother summoned him once more to Paris. He was to be presented at Court. The Maréchal de Duras had promised to be his sponsor.

He was presented, but nothing came of it. "Sire, the Chevalier de Chateaubriand," said M. de Duras, as Louis XVI passed down the corridor on the way to Mass; "but the King was more embarrassed than I was, could think of nothing to say to me, and walked on." He had the chance of joining the Queen's card party in the evening, but he declined it; nor was he present, as he had been advised to be, when the King's hunting-boots were pulled off in the presence of the Court. Evidently he was no courtier, but was at once too proud and too shy for the *rôle*. He would be happy to meet kings and queens when he could meet them on what he could consider equal terms; but that was impossible for the eighteen-year-old subaltern from the country. Moreover, he had



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other ambitions ; he was writing poetry for the *Almanach des Muses*, and was absorbed in the study of Greek—a more usual relaxation with French than with English soldiers.

His next military station was Dieppe. He tells us that he drilled recruits there on the pebble beach, and acquired a taste for the profession of arms ; but his taste for it did not prevent him from neglecting it. The laxity of discipline—it was lax, at any rate, for officers—allowed him to live pretty much as he liked, and he spent most of his time in Paris, frequenting the society of men of letters. The list of his literary acquaintances included Flins des Oliviers, Fontanes, Ginguené, the Chevalier de Parny, Le Brun, Chamfort, and La Harpe. The house in which he was most at home was that of M. de Malesherbes, whose granddaughter his brother, Jean-Baptiste, had married. He conversed with M. de Malesherbes, not of military matters, but of “botany and geography”—subjects then in vogue, in consequence of the writings of Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, and the travels of Bougainville and La Pérouse. Maps were spread on the table, and Chateaubriand said that he would like, above all things, to go to America and discover the North-West Passage. Sometimes, too, there were amateur theatrical performances, in which Lucile was once persuaded to play a part.

Another ambitious project was formed for Chateaubriand about this time. He was to become a Knight of Malta—a quasi-ecclesiastical position to which no duties, but substantial emoluments were attached. “I had a prospect,” he writes, “of an income of 200,000

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livres." A condition of eligibility was that he should receive the tonsure, and he did so. The objections of the Bishop of Saint Malo were overcome by the arguments of Madame de Chateaubriand. The Bishop was persuaded that the son might properly be ordained because the mother was pious. He "snipped off two or three hairs" from the crown of the young soldier's head, giving him, not too much tonsure, but just tonsure enough to qualify him for the material benefits in view.

"No doubt the arrangement was an ecclesiastical abuse," he comments, "but it had its utility under the old *régime*; and surely it was better that a military endowment of this kind should be the guerdon of the soldier's sword than that it should be attached to the robe of an abbé who would doubtless proceed to eat up his rich benefice in the streets of Paris!"

Very possibly; but the point need not be argued, since, for all practical purposes, the Revolution solved the problem.

That Revolution, foreseen by so few, was now drawing very near. The year in which Chateaubriand received the tonsure was 1788—the year in which Arthur Young drove through Combourg inquiring, "Who is this Mons. de Chateaubriant?" The answer should have been that he was a young man who favoured reform in general, though he was prepared to profit from an ecclesiastical abuse, but who would not, like Mirabeau, desert his order when sides had to be taken. And that was to be soon—at the States-General elections at Rennes in January 1789.

The nobles, Chateaubriand among them, met in

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the Convent of the Jacobins in the Place du Palais. There was a riot in the town ; and the rioters, led by Chateaubriand's school-fellow, the future General Moreau, then a student at the Rennes law school, blockaded them in their hall.

“Our president gave the signal, and we all drew our swords and shouted, ‘Vive la Bretagne!’ and, like a garrison reduced to the last extremity, we executed a furious sortie, meaning to pass over the bodies of our assailants. The populace received us with howls, and volleys of stones, and blows from their sticks, and shots from their pistols. We carved ourselves a passage through the flood of humanity, which closed again behind us. A number of noblemen were wounded, dragged in the mire till their clothes were torn, and much bruised and injured ; we got clear of the mob, with the greatest difficulty, and dispersed.”

That was the very first scene of violence arising out of or leading up to the Revolution, and Chateaubriand passed through it unscathed. Had he perished then, he reflects, the historian would merely have recorded the death of “a young gentleman named Chateaubriand.” Instead of which—

Private affairs detained him for some time in Brittany ; he was back in Paris soon after the memorable day on which the Deputies, assembled in the Tennis Court at Versailles, dared the King to send his soldiers to disperse them. He saw the storming of the Bastille ; the first heads carried on the first pikes ; the triumphant procession which brought the royal family to Paris. He also witnessed some of the

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stormiest sittings of the Constituent Assembly. All this, however, merely as a spectator of scenes in which there was no part for him; so that his vivid word-pictures of the turmoil need not be quoted here. It is only in his recollections of his meetings with Mirabeau that his personality appears.

He met him twice, he says, at dinners or receptions. On the first occasion Mirabeau "enchanted" him with his "tales of love." On the second he looked at him "with his eyes full of pride and vice and genius," and slapped him on the back, exclaiming, with a side glance at his rivals and detractors: "Those fellows there will never forgive me for my superiority to them." Whereupon Chateaubriand characteristically comments—

"When Mirabeau thus fixed his gaze upon a mute young man, had he, I wonder, any presentiment of the things which the future held in store for me? Did he suspect that he would one day appear before the tribunal of my reminiscences? It was my destiny to become the historian of exalted personages. They have defiled before me, but I did not hang on to their cloaks, nor have I descended to posterity as one of their train."

His own testimony to his life at this time stands almost alone; and perhaps, like his recollections of his childhood, it is not entirely to be trusted. Perhaps it is not even true that Mirabeau chose him for his confidant when he denounced the other revolutionists for their jealousy of his talents. He used the words cited, according to other versions of the story, but not



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in conversation with Chateaubriand, who added that touch for the sake of rhetorical effect. It may be so, but it makes little difference. The picture which Chateaubriand draws of himself is confirmed as a whole, if not in detail, by the two other witnesses whom his biographer, Villemain, cites.

A M. de Pommereul used to meet him sometimes at supper. Chateaubriand, he said, "had talent." But he "never spoke a word," though "you know what a noise he has since made in the world."

The Chevalier de Panat, then holding a commission as captain in the navy, knew him rather better.

"I soon saw what stuff he had in him," he said to Villemain. "I talked to Fontanes about him, and he agreed with me. In 1789, when Lally and Mounier left France, I tried to induce him to join the emigration. He hesitated; he was in love; and he already suffered from the melancholy which is sister to inaction. Afterwards, however, in some walks that we took together, and once when I met him together with Fontanes and Rivarol<sup>1</sup> at Saint Cloud, he impressed me as a man of genius, although half mad."

The love story to which the Chevalier alludes was not of any moment, though a paragraph is consecrated to it in the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*. A M. Monet, a mine manager, and his daughter used to take Chateaubriand to the theatre. "I do not know," he says,

<sup>1</sup> Rivarol, who afterwards joined the emigration and lived at Hamburg, was reputed the most brilliant talker of his day.

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“whether I was in love with her. I do know that I was afraid of her. Sometimes, however, I used to call, in a great state of nervousness, and take her for a walk. She took my arm, and I think I sometimes squeezed her hand.”

No more than that. Chateaubriand as yet was in the very early days of his apprenticeship to love. It was in travel that he proposed to seek sentiment and adventure.

His regiment, then stationed at Rouen, had mutinied. He had not been with it, so far as one can make out, for nearly a twelvemonth ; and now he was free even from the theoretical obligation to rejoin it. His brother officers went to join the army of Condé, which was gathering at Coblenz to reconquer France for Louis XVI ; but he stayed on in Paris, going, as we have just seen, to the theatre, and for walks, with Mademoiselle Monet, but at the same time pondering a more ambitious scheme.

“He unfolded to me,” says the Chevalier de Panat, “his project of discovering the North-West Passage. I offered such objections as naturally occurred to a man who had sailed the seas, and was acquainted with the charts. His answer was : ‘The thing I am looking for is novelty. There is nothing to be done here. The King is lost, and there will be no counter-revolution. The step which I propose to take is like that of the Puritans who emigrated, in the seventeenth century, to Virginia. I am going to the forests ; that is better than going to Coblenz. What is the good of emigrating merely from France ? I, for my part, am an emigrant from the world. Either I shall die on my

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way, or else I shall return a different man from him who now departs.' ”

And so saying, Chateaubriand went down again into Brittany, made his preparations, collected letters of introduction, and arranged for his passage on the *Saint-Pierre*, a brig of 160 tons, which left St. Malo on April 8, 1791.

The vessel carried several passengers besides Chateaubriand—seminarists sent across the ocean to found a Catholic establishment at Baltimore. One of them, M. de Mondésir, wrote out, in later life, his recollections of the voyage, and of his illustrious companion ; and his manuscript is still in the library of the Seminary of Saint Sulpice. It is a less poetical narrative than Chateaubriand's own, but more circumstantial, and one can better trust the picture which it draws. It shows us Chateaubriand beginning to act upon the guiding principle of his life—that he who would create an effect must strike an attitude ; and we gather that his attitude was at once that of the “*esprit fort*” and that of the man of soul and sensibility.

As “*esprit fort*”—a rationalist disciple of rationalist philosophers—he persuaded one of the seminarists, a young English convert named Tulloch, to abandon his orders and return to the ampler life of the world. On the other hand, in the character of man of soul and sensibility, he prayed and even preached.

“The ebullient Chateaubriand,” writes the ecclesiastical chronicler, “was much fonder of reading works of piety aloud than of listening to them in seemly

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silence. He read much oftener than it was his turn to read; and M. Nagot had one day to tell him that an austere devotional meditation ought not to be declaimed like a tragedy."

And on Good Friday—

"After the service, M. de Chateaubriand asked M. Nagot's permission to speak a few words to the sailors, who were good Bretons and good Catholics. The Superior consented, and our new missionary took a large crucifix in his hands, and proceeded to harangue the crew, delivering himself of such forcible phrases and such burning words that, if only there had been a Jew on board, I feel sure the sailors would have thrown him overboard."

The most vivid picture of all, however, is of Chateaubriand's conduct in the storm—

"We met several gales while crossing, and once we encountered a veritable hurricane. M. de Chateaubriand, full of his Greek authors, and disposed to take Homer's heroes for his models, caused himself to be lashed, like Ulysses, to the mainmast, where the winds buffeted him and the waves swept over him. He bravely faced both winds and waves, however, and kept up his courage by apostrophizing the tempest: 'O tempest,' he kept exclaiming, 'beautiful as thou art, thou art less beautiful than Homer's picture of thee.'"

And so, after some delay at the Azores (where Chateaubriand says that he sat up all night drinking



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with the monks in a monastery), and at the island of Saint-Pierre (where he tells us that a pretty girl fled precipitately from him because he offered to present her with a corset of Parisian style and cut), to Baltimore, where he landed on July 10.

## CHAPTER IV

The journey through America—Chateaubriand's veracity impugned—M. Joseph Bédier's analysis of his itinerary—Did he really meet George Washington?

CHATEAUBRIAND, says Sainte-Beuve,<sup>1</sup> "made a romance of" his adventures in the United States.

He did—there can be no question whatsoever about that. It was suspected from the beginning, and now it can be proved. In this section of the *Mémoires*, and in the more formal *Voyage en Amérique*, he gives us *warheit und dichtung* in the guise of the relation of a journey. How much of that relation was romance, and how little was reality, not even Sainte-Beuve, with all his malice, and scepticism, and acumen, guessed.

It was a journey which Chateaubriand never forgot—on which, to the end of his days, he never ceased to insist.

There were many Frenchmen who crossed the ocean at about the same period, and who did not insist. Most of them hung on to the skirts of civilization, and comported themselves accordingly. The brothers d'Orléans called on Washington, and were announced as "three Equalities." The Comtesse de la Tour du Pin took a farm, and brought her own

<sup>1</sup> In *Chateaubriand et son Groupe Littéraire sous l'Empire*.

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butter and eggs to market. Moreau de Saint Méry opened a stationer's shop. The Vicomte de Noailles became a partner in the banking house of Bingham and Company of Philadelphia. The Bishop of Autun<sup>1</sup> paraded the streets of the same city with a negress of light reputation on his arm. It is intelligible that the Bishop of Autun, when he had become an ambassador, did not insist upon that.

But Chateaubriand did insist. He, for his part, had forsaken civilization and plunged into the forests. He had roamed the continent—so he would have us think, and so he almost came to believe—from North to South, and from East to West, from Niagara to Florida, and from Philadelphia almost to New Orleans. He came to see himself, and to present himself, not as *a* traveller, but as *the* traveller, whose style had been coloured, and whose mind had been stored, by his unique experiences in the wilderness. "*Atala*," he tells us, "was written in the huts of the savages." The shores of Egypt reminded him of "the Floridan lagunes." "Never," he says, reporting some conversation with Madame Joubert and Madame de Beaumont, "never did I describe the wilds of the New World so graphically ;" while his later travels in Italy call forth the comment : "My name is written in the wigwams of the savages of Florida, and now it is recorded in the book of the hermit of Vesuvius." And so forth, and so forth, in defiance of the demonstrable facts.

There were whispers of scepticism even when *Atala* appeared. That romance related that bears "intoxicated themselves with grapes and walked with

<sup>1</sup> Talleyrand.

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staggering steps upon the branches of the elms." Abbé Morellet and Marie-Joseph Chénier boggled at that statement, but Chateaubriand defended himself in the grand style, and silenced them. *Atala* had been translated into English. The translations had been read by the Americans. There had been no protest, no contradiction: "*Atala* has returned to the wilderness, and his fatherland has recognized him as a true child of its solitudes." In the face of that, Morellet and Chénier had nothing more to say.

America, however, had not accepted *Atala*, or had only accepted it provisionally. It was precisely from America that the first effective criticism came. In December 1827 the *American Quarterly Review* published an article on Chateaubriand's collected works, in the course of which the writer said—

"He is evidently willing to have it thought that he had lived long and travelled much in our wilderness, and among our Indians, and, in particular, that he was well acquainted with Louisiana, the Mississippi, and Florida. But this cannot be. His descriptions of scenery in *Atala* and in *The Natchez* are thoroughly false. A person capable of peopling the banks of the Mississippi with parrots, monkeys and flamingoes, can never have been there."

That was the beginning of doubt. We find an echo of it—and something more than an echo—in a letter signed René de M——, dated from New York in 1832, and published in the Fribourg magazine *L'Invariable*, under the title "Découverte d'une petite mystification." We are here given an imaginary conversation between "an old settler" and a traveller



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whose anticipations of America are derived from Chateaubriand's writings. The charges of ignorance brought in the *American Quarterly Review* are quoted and supplemented. Chateaubriand, says the settler, describes the Ohio and applies the description to the Mississippi, makes two rivers, the Wabash and the Tennessee, flow in the wrong direction, places mountains where there are only occasional bluffs to be found, lakes where there are only rivers, and forests where there are only prairies, falls into gross errors about the fauna as well as the flora, and, at Niagara, mistakes the bearings of both the American and the Canadian falls. And his conclusion is—

“Assuredly I should, no longer ago than this morning, have regarded as a lunatic the man who advised me to place the works of this writer on the same shelf in my library as the *Travels of Gulliver* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*; but I now perceive with pain that that is the proper position for them.”

The traveller's veracity could not have been more formally impugned; but the challenge provoked no answer, and produced no perceptible effect. Probably, since the publications of Fribourg are little read in Paris, Chateaubriand never even heard of it. Sainte-Beuve, who was acquainted with it, gave it less attention than it deserved. The inaccuracies noted were for him merely illustrations of Chateaubriand's “grand style and careless methods.” Doubtless, he says, Chateaubriand travelled fast, impelled by that ennui which always, throughout his long life, pursued him from place to place and from emotion to emotion. And so the matter rested—doubts being

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hinted rather than openly expressed, and the narrative as a whole being taken on trust—until in 1903 M. Joseph Bédier<sup>1</sup> analyzed the itinerary, and demonstrated that Chateaubriand was no *bona fide* explorer, but, on the contrary, “a sublime Tartarin,” if not actually a sublime Munchausen. For it appears—

1. Chateaubriand could not have covered the ground which he professes to have covered in the time which he had at his disposal, even if he had been, all the time, in flight from Indians hunting for his scalp.

2. Chateaubriand unscrupulously annexed the adventures of other earlier travellers, and represented them as his own.

3. In the one instance in which Chateaubriand's story can be checked from other sources—in the case, that is to say, of his alleged interview with Washington—it is demonstrable that he does not speak the truth.

The initial deception is in the matter of dates. “I left France,” we read in the Introduction to the *Voyage en Amérique*, “at the beginning of 1791;” and the date of the return is given approximately as “July 1792.” One would infer, therefore, that Chateaubriand's travels extended over a period of something like eighteen months; and in eighteen months he would doubtless have had time to go to all the places to which he tells us that he went. His statements, however, can be checked by the records of the ships on which he embarked; and from these

<sup>1</sup> *Études critiques*. Par Joseph Bédier (Armand Colin).

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it can be determined that he landed at Baltimore on July 10, 1791, and re-embarked at Philadelphia on the 10th of the following December. The duration of his sojourn, therefore, was not eighteen months, but five, and into those five we have to fit the following itinerary—

Baltimore to Philadelphia—Philadelphia to New York—New York to Boston—Boston to New York—New York to Albany and Niagara—Exploration of the Lakes of Canada—Journey down the Ohio from Lake Erie to Pittsburg—Descent of the Ohio and Mississippi to New Orleans—Exploration of Louisiana and Florida—Journey north by Nashville, Knoxville, Salem, Chillicothe—Chillicothe to Philadelphia.

The journey would be of no importance, of course, in these days of trains and steamers. But those were the days of stage coaches and canoes. It was not only improbable that Chateaubriand would get over the ground in the time. It was physically impossible for him to do so. That is what M. Bédier has shown. Following the traveller stage by stage, and computing the minimum time required for the accomplishment of each stage by reference to authentic contemporary road-books, we come to this conclusion—

Supposing that Chateaubriand raced through the United States as if bent upon making a “best on record” time; supposing that there were no hitches and no delays; supposing that he never stopped to pay a visit or to see a sight, other than the one or two sights which he specifies; supposing that, wherever he arrived, he invariably found coaches, horses, canoes,

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and guides awaiting his pleasure ; supposing that he never lost his way, or stuck in the mud, or was held up by bad weather ; supposing that, when he journeyed on horseback, he rode fifty miles a day, day after day—supposing all these incredibly favourable conditions, he would not have completed his circular tour and arrived at Philadelphia until a fortnight after the boat by which we know him to have returned to France had sailed.

So far, so good ; but even that is not all. For Chateaubriand, it must be noted, makes no claim to having travelled with the rapidity of a personally-conducted excursionist. He pictures himself as rambling rather than racing, as divagating, and lingering to observe. He “explored,” he says, “the savage ruins of Scioto” ; he made “geodesic observations” ; he made “botanical notes to be shown to M. de Malesherbes” ; he studied the manners and customs, rites and ceremonies, modes of government, and methods of agriculture of the Indians ; and he also kept a diary and wrote two books. *Atala*, he assures us, was written “in the huts of the savages” ; and so was a certain *History of a Savage Canadian Tribe*, of which the manuscript was lost, “a kind of novel, with an entirely new setting which would have been worthy of the reader’s attention.” All this in five months. To state the claim is to confute it, and we have no need of further witnesses.

Yet, if further witnesses were wanted, we might call no less a witness than George Washington.

Chateaubriand, we read, had a letter of introduction to Washington, was received by him, and was “unmoved by his presence.” The description of the



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alleged interview is one of the most eloquent passages in the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*."

"Neither grandeur of soul nor greatness of fortune or estate ever impresses me unduly. I can admire the former without being overwhelmed by it; the latter inspires me with pity rather than respect; and I never feel troubled by the gaze of any man."

Let that pass. The proposition is too vague and general to lend itself to specific confutation. It is otherwise when we come to details and particulars.

"When I arrived at Philadelphia," writes Chateaubriand, "General Washington was not there. I had to wait a fortnight for him. At the end of that time he returned."

But Washington's movements, as it happens, can be fixed from his correspondence, and from the newspapers of the period—the *Gazette of the United States*, the *Federal Gazette*, etc. He was at Philadelphia on the day of Chateaubriand's arrival, and he remained there after Chateaubriand's departure. It is almost certain that he never left the city at all between July 6 and September 6, and it is quite certain that he never left it for more than a day or two. The alleged fortnight's absence is demonstrably a figment of Chateaubriand's imagination, a circumstantial detail introduced apparently for the purpose of giving "verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative," but actually affording the strongest circumstantial evidence that the narrative is untrue.

Chateaubriand, then—the inference is irresistible—

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never saw Washington at all, or saw him only, as any one might have seen him, from a Philadelphian sidewalk, as he was driving through the streets. Those were the circumstances in which he was "unmoved by his presence," and "passed before him as an absolutely unknown young man"; and that view of the case is further strengthened by the alleged visitor's errors in his description of his alleged host's household. He says that the President kept no men-servants, whereas he kept several, including a French cook. And so forth; the veracity of Chateaubriand's story collapsing completely in the one instance in which it can be arraigned at the bar of proved historical fact.

The discovery prepares the mind for further scepticism, and for the further discovery that, even in writing his autobiography, Chateaubriand took his good things where he found them, and that his "sources" were the writings of earlier travellers who had really visited the regions of which he wrote with the air of a man who, hungry for new experiences, had been the first to burst into the fastnesses of the virgin forest, to consort with Iroquois and Seminoles, and to explore the Lakes of Canada and the Floridan lagunes.

## CHAPTER V

The sources of Chateaubriand's narrative of his travels—*Florello*—Charlevoix—Bartram—Proofs of plagiarism—Ennui—Return to France—Marriage—The army of Condé—Arrival in England.

“A PREDECESSOR of René”—and René is always Chateaubriand, though Chateaubriand is not always René—was recently introduced to the public by M. Baldensperger in the *Revue de philologie française et de littérature*.

This predecessor's name is Joseph-Marie Loisel de Tréogate. The title of his book, reviewed in the *Mercur de France* in July 1776, is *Florello : histoire méridionale*. M. Baldensperger describes it as “a rough, halting outline of *Les Natchez*,” with the scene laid, not in North America, but in South, on the banks, not of the Mississippi, but of the Oronoko. “A worthy ancient named Kadorg” has lived for forty years in the wilds there—just like Chactas. One evening, taking his walks abroad, he meets a young European “whose outward appearance indicates the sorrows of his soul.” The young European is Florello; and Florello is an earlier René.

Chateaubriand never mentions Florello; but the presumption is strong that he had heard of him and was acquainted with his sentimental adventures. The book must have been in the shops when he was living in Paris. It was the sort of book that he would be

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sure to read if he lighted on it, and to imitate—for youth is always imitative—if he read it. The resemblance between *René* and *Florello* is, at any rate, too striking for the coincidence to be readily accepted as accidental; and the probability is great that *Florello* is one of the “sources”—the sentimental source, in fact. The other sources—those from which Chateaubriand derived his descriptions and his adventures—were, as has been said, the writings of previous travellers. He owed a great deal to Charlevoix; he owed even more to William Bartram.

Bartram was a Quaker of Pennsylvania, a son of John Bartram, the founder of the first botanical garden in the United States, and himself the founder of the American Philosophical Society. He and his father were employed by Dr. Fothergill of London to collect plants in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. His *Travels*, published in Philadelphia, London, and Dublin, were translated into French. Chateaubriand admits that he knew them, and used them.<sup>1</sup> “A few extracts carefully translated” had, he says, found their way into his notes. With these extracts, he adds, are mingled his own “rectifications, reflections, additions, and descriptions.” The whole is “so woven together that it is practically impossible to disentangle, or even to recognize, what belongs to Bartram.”

But that is nonsense. Everything belongs to Bartram; nothing belongs to Chateaubriand—nothing, that is to say, except the flowing periods and the highly-coloured style. Wherever the descriptions are

<sup>1</sup> They were probably in the library of Mr. Ives.



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correct, they are taken bodily from Bartram—except in the few cases in which they are taken bodily from Charlevoix, or Jonathan Carver, or J. E. Bonnet, or Le Page du Pratz. Wherever the descriptions are correct, they can be identified as Bartram's or another's. Wherever the help of Bartram, or another, was not available, the descriptions are incorrect. There is nothing in Bartram about the scenery, or the flora and fauna, of the Mississippi. Hence the monkeys, parrots, and flamingoes which Chateaubriand professed to have seen on the banks of the Father of Waters. But Bartram had explored Florida thoroughly, and Chateaubriand was therefore able to pretend successfully that he had done the same. Whatever Bartram saw he says that he saw too; and this particular section of the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* is neither more nor less than an elaborate paraphrase of Bartram.

Nor is that all. Even *Atala* was largely a paraphrase from Bartram. The romance alleged to have been composed "in the huts of the savages" is full of extracts from a work which the author cannot possibly have read until after his return to France.

Demonstrations of plagiarism by means of parallel columns are sometimes tiresome to follow; but that method of proof is hardly to be avoided in this case. Happily a few extracts will suffice.

### BARTRAM.

I was awakened in the morning early by the cheering converse of the wild turkey cocks. . . . The high forests ring with the noise . . . insomuch that the

### CHATEAUBRIAND.

I had not advanced a hundred yards into the wood when I perceived a flock of turkeys. . . . In the evening they perch on the highest branches of the trees.

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whole country is, for an hour or more, in a universal shout. A little after sunrise their crowing gradually ceases, they quit their high lodging places, and alight on the earth, where, expanding their silver-bordered trains, they strut and dance about the coy female.

### BARTRAM.

The *hibiscus coccineus* grows ten or twelve feet high, branching regularly so as to form a sharp cone. These branches also divide again, and are embellished with large expanded crimson flowers, which can be seen at a great distance.

### BARTRAM.

. . . evident remains of a large town of the . . . It was situated on an eminence near the banks of the lake. . . . On the site . . . stands a very pompous Indian monument, or conical pyramid of earth, from which runs in a straight line a grand avenue or Indian highway, through a magnificent grove of magnolias, live oaks, palms, and orange-trees, terminating at the verge of a large green level savanna. This island appears to have been well inhabited, as is evident from the quantities of fragments of Indian earthenware, bones of animals, and other remains.

In the morning the noise of their cry rings through the lofty forest. A little after sunrise their crowing ceases, and they descend and alight upon the ground.

### CHATEAUBRIAND.

We then observed a species of *hibiscus*. This enormous grass grows in low-lying and humid places to the height of ten or twelve feet, and terminates in an extremely sharp cone. The smooth leaves, divided a little, are embellished by beautiful crimson flowers, which can be seen at a great distance.

### CHATEAUBRIAND.

An unexpected spectacle met our gaze. We discovered an Indian ruin. It was situated on an eminence near the banks of the lake. On the left we saw a pyramid of earth, from forty to forty-five feet high. From the pyramid another road ran through a magnificent grove of magnolias and live oaks, terminating in a savanna. Fragments of earthenware, and other utensils, were scattered about, mingled with fossils, shells, petrified plants, and the bones of animals. . . . What people had inhabited this island?

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### *BARTRAM.*

Innumerable bands of fish are seen; the voracious crocodile, stretched along at full length, as the great trunk of a tree in size; the devouring drum-fish, inimical trout, and all the varieties of gilded, painted, bream; the barbed catfish, dreaded sting-ray, skate, and flounder, spotted bass, sheep's head, and omnivorous drum; all in their separate bands and communities, with free and unsuspecting intercourse performing their evolutions; there are no signs of enmity, no attempt to devour each other . . . suffering themselves to be gently lifted or borne up by the expanding fluid towards the surface, falling or floating like butterflies in the cerulean ether . . . you imagine the picture to be within a few inches of your eyes, and that you may without difficulty touch any one of the fish.

### *CHATEAUBRIAND.*

The crocodile, floating like the trunk of a tree, the trout, the pike, the perch, the flounder, the bass, the bream, the drum-fish, the gold fish, all one another's mortal enemies, swam together in the lake, seeming to have sworn a truce in order to enjoy the beauty of the enemy in common. The blue fluid took the hue of their changing colours. The water was so clear that you would have thought you could touch the actors in this scene with your finger.

That is enough—perhaps it is too much—for any reader's patience; and, of course, if that were all, one would not make much ado about so little. It is, however, only a minute fraction of the indictment, presented as an example. The total number of extracts from Bartram which M. Bédier has discovered embedded in Chateaubriand is forty-seven, and even his list is not exhaustive. The extracts from Charlevoix are still more numerous, and those from Carver only a little less so. Many of them are considerably longer than those which it has been possible to quote here; and, when they are all struck out, very little indeed remains; and the obvious conclusion must be

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drawn; Chateaubriand's relation of his journey was a relation of a journey which he did not take. It is not even a work of imagination; it is a work of plagiarism.

Perhaps Chateaubriand got as far as Niagara; more probably he did not. His story that he fell over a precipice, broke his arm above the elbow, had it set by Indians, and had sufficiently recovered at the end of twelve days to "explore the Lakes of Canada," is not of the sort that commands ready credence. He may, again, have seen something of the Indians; but he certainly cannot have seen very much of them, for he idealizes them after the manner of James Fenimore Cooper, as "the men of Nature." Most likely the only rivers on whose waters he really floated were the Hudson and Delaware; most likely the only forests in whose fastnesses he lost himself were those in the immediate vicinity of New York. It would not have been necessary for him to go very far, in 1791, in order to meet savages and receive the impression of unutterable solitude.

He writes as a man who has received that impression and rejoiced in it. That was his pose throughout his life; and probably no such consistent pose is ever altogether insincere. It is far more likely to be the theatrical exaggeration of a natural tendency; and we must take that view of Chateaubriand's pose if we are to understand it aright.

Ennui, the disease of the age, devoured him; and he cultivated the malady instead of trying to cure it, admiring and exhibiting the symptoms, after the fashion of many an interesting "case." "I yawn my



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way through life," he said to M. de Marcellus<sup>1</sup>; and, having used the phrase in conversation, he promptly put it in a book. He was half a savage, too—or liked to think so—"tameless, and swift, and proud"; and, when he had achieved ambition and stood on a pinnacle amid applause, the trammels of society and civilization galled him, and the consoling summons to the wilderness sounded in his ears. And he had penetrated the wilderness, though only a little way; and he knew that the pose would be much more effective if he could imagine—and make the world imagine—that he had really consorted with savages in their remotest wilds; and, with Bartram and Carver and Charlevoix to help him, it seemed an easy thing to do. He did it; he was sublime. It was quite a long while before he was found out and classed as "a sublime Tartarin," who falsely claimed that ennui had driven him further into the wilderness than any other man of equal sensibility.

If ennui drove him forth, however, though but a little way, it seems not less certain that ennui brought him back.

The alleged motive is, indeed, the sense of duty. Chateaubriand picked up an old newspaper in a remote farm-house, and read in it an account of Louis XVI's flight to Varennes—

"A sudden change was effected in my frame of mind. . . . The clash of arms and the riotous noises of the world rang in my ears as I sat in the thatched cottage of a miller in the obscure and distant forest.

<sup>1</sup> Secretary of the Embassy in London when Chateaubriand was Ambassador there.

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I brought my travels to a sudden termination, saying to myself: 'Return to France.'

Which may, or may not, be true. For, as Sainte-Beuve says, the human heart—and especially the poet's heart—is unstable, and tires quickly of the satisfaction of its supposed desires, and is always glad to abandon a pleasure which has been too long protracted—"above all when it is persuaded that the abandonment is an act of sacrifice."

In any case, however, and for whatever reason, Chateaubriand hurried home, and made his arrangements to join the army of Condé, then on the point of invading France. Honour, he felt, required it. A Breton nobleman could do no less. It was only a question of raising the necessary money for the expedition; and, as the endowments of the Order of Malta, on which he had relied, had been confiscated by the nation, an alternative fiscal plan had to be found—

"This conjunction of circumstances was responsible for the most serious of all the events of my life. My relatives married me in order to furnish me with the means of going to get killed in defence of a cause to which I was indifferent."

The bride was Mlle. de Lavigne, of an old Breton family. The bridegroom hardly knew her, and did not feel that he possessed "any of the qualifications of a husband."

"But Lucile was very fond of Mlle. de Lavigne, and thought that this marriage would make me

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independent. 'Very well,' I said. 'Have it your own way.' For, in my case, it is only the public man who has a will of iron. In my private capacity, I am at the mercy of any one who tries to influence me, and I would willingly enslave myself for a century to avoid worry for an hour."

And this is another of the stories which may, and also may not, be true; for Sainte-Beuve, on the authority of Viennet, tells quite a different story. Chateaubriand, he suggests, had "compromised" Mlle. de Lavigne; with the result that an angry uncle arrived with a priest and a pair of pistols, and insisted, with threats, that the marriage should take place there and then. That story, given his proud and sullen temper, would explain his instant desertion of his wife quite as well as his desire to fight the battles of a king for whom he felt no enthusiasm. It would also explain why he did not rejoin his wife—or arrange for her to rejoin him—after the fighting was over: an omission which assuredly needs more explanation than the *Mémoires* offer. But the proofs are inconclusive, and the mystery must remain unsolved.<sup>1</sup> All that is certain is that Chateaubriand started for the frontier immediately after his marriage, and did not see Madame de Chateaubriand again until several years had elapsed.

He fought at the siege of Thionville, and did enough for honour; but his recital of his adventures

<sup>1</sup> M. Biré, Chateaubriand's latest editor, throws doubt upon the story; but he offers no alternative explanation of Chateaubriand's reluctance to live with his wife.

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in that campaign need not detain us. We need not trouble ourselves to consider whether he speaks the truth when he tells us that he carried in his knapsack the manuscript of the romance which he professes to have "written in the huts of the savages." Presently he caught small-pox, yet managed, somehow or other, to drag himself back to Brussels, and to Ostend, whence he found his way to Jersey, where his uncle, M. de Bedée, and some of his cousins had taken refuge. He stayed with them, gradually recovering his health, for about four months. At the end of that time he took the packet for England, landing at Southampton in 1793 with thirty louis in his purse.



## CHAPTER VI

Chateaubriand in London—The Royal Literary Fund—Ill health—Visit to Suffolk—Charlotte Ives—A proposal of marriage—"I am a married man"—Return to London—Literary work—The *Essai sur les Révolutions*—Chateaubriand makes the acquaintance of Fontanes.

THE Terror raged in France, and many of Chateaubriand's relatives were numbered among its victims. His brother and his brother's wife were taken to the Place of the Guillotine in the same tumbril with his aged friend, M. de Malesherbes, "who defended Louis and could not speak, like a grey old rock dissolving into sudden waters."<sup>1</sup> His mother was imprisoned in Paris, and his wife and his sister Lucile were imprisoned at Rennes, until the events of Thermidor released them. And he meanwhile starved—or came very near to starving—in a Holborn garret.

Baylis the printer let him a furnished lodging at a guinea a month. He earned what he could by literary hack work—chiefly translation from the Latin and the French<sup>2</sup>—and began, at the same time, to write what he hoped might prove a "magnum opus," his *Essai sur les Révolutions*. The work was very hard, and the pay was very poor; his prospects were black, and his distress was deep. He dined, as long as he could afford to do so, at a shilling ordinary in a tavern.

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle.

<sup>2</sup> So he says; but one doubts, for his English, as we shall see, was hardly up to the mark.

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Presently he had to cut his dinner-money down to sixpence. There were days—several consecutive days—on which he had nothing to drink but water, and nothing to eat but bread. At the same time, his health was in a bad way, and he was spitting blood. He had, as he puts it, “his tomb-stone for a desk.”

At the time when he wrote out these recollections of his terrible experiences, he was French Ambassador—“a magnificent Ambassador,” he says—to the Court of Saint James’s, and had just sat next to Canning, and heard his health proposed in flattering terms at the annual dinner of the Royal Literary Fund. The memories evoked, and the thought of the contrast between the present and the past, had moved him to tears and generosity. When the collection was made, writes his secretary, M. de Marcellus,<sup>1</sup> “he emptied both his purse and mine;” and when, after the feast was over, he and M. de Marcellus were driving home together, he lay back in the *coupé* and quoted “Sunt lacrimae rerum.” If the Royal Literary Fund had been in existence in 1794, he reflected, he would have been a worthy object of its benevolence, and the almoner of the society might have done worse than pay his doctor’s bill.

The fund did, as a matter of fact, exist in 1794, having been instituted in 1790; and its administrators were always willing to assist foreigners as well as Englishmen. At the very dinner which Chateaubriand attended, the secretary reported that the society had “discovered the venerable Bard of Iceland where he patiently reclined beneath the shed of

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Envoy Extraordinary to Madrid, and Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Polignac’s Administration.

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poverty. . . ." In 1794, however, it was still a very young and poor society ; and very likely Chateaubriand, even if he had been aware of its existence, would have been too proud to apply to it for a grant—just as he was, he assures us, too proud to apply for the shilling a day which the British Government allotted, by way of "outdoor relief," to all French *émigrés* who needed it, preferring to wander, hungry, through the streets, lying under the trees in Kensington Gardens, or mournfully contemplating the monuments in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey. "The bust of an unknown man like me," he reflected sadly in the great cathedral, "will never find a place among these illustrious effigies ;" but his sighs and aspirations in the former resort were of a different order. "I wonder," he writes, "whether any of the beautiful women there divined the invisible presence of René."

Presumably none of them did ; there was no reason why any of them should. But Chateaubriand's first romance—the romance to which he owed at least a part of the inspiration of *René*—was nevertheless very near at hand, though not London, but Bungay in the County of Suffolk, was to be the scene of it.

One of his friends in London was Peltier, a journalist, afterwards *chargé d'affaires* in London of the black king of Haiti, who paid him a good salary in bales of sugar, which he sold to the best advantage. Peltier, his story goes, came to him one day and showed him an advertisement in a Yarmouth newspaper. A committee of antiquaries, at whose head was the Vicar of Beccles,<sup>1</sup> were preparing a history of the county.

<sup>1</sup> Bence Sparrow. Chateaubriand, curiously enough, omits all mention of his name.

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They wanted a Frenchman to help them to decipher some old French manuscripts in the Camden collection ; they offered him two hundred guineas for his services. It was the very thing. Chateaubriand applied for the appointment and got it ; and he and Peltier celebrated his good fortune with a banquet of roast beef, plum-pudding, and port wine.

This is what he tells us ; but he does not tell us the truth. As he “made a romance” of his travels in America, so he “made a romance” of his visit to Suffolk.

The alleged advertisement in a Yarmouth paper is a figment, for the first Yarmouth paper—the *Yarmouth Herald*—did not begin to appear until 1804 ; and the files of the *Norwich Mercury*, in which it might conceivably have been published, have been searched for it in vain. No trace can be discovered of any such society of antiquaries as that which Chateaubriand refers to ; and neither Wilton Rix, the historian of Beccles, nor Alfred Suckling, the historian of Suffolk, makes any reference to Chateaubriand's work in such a connection. Finally, there does not exist, and never has existed, any Camden collection of manuscripts ; and the Cottonian collection, which more or less answers to Chateaubriand's description, was to be seen, not in Suffolk, but in London. The fact of the matter is that Chateaubriand was in Beccles, not as a *savant*, but as a school-master<sup>1</sup> and a private tutor.

He hated the recollection, and was ashamed of it. His contempt for the trade of a teacher of languages is expressed in more than one passage in his writings. He speaks of it in the *Essai* mentioned above as “unworthy of a superior person” ; and he repeats the

<sup>1</sup> Bence Sparrow was one of the school governors.



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sentiment in the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*, where he tells of a certain relative of his, a poor but proud abbé, who was offered the post of tutor to the Duc de Bourbon and returned the haughty answer that the Prince de Condé, who had proposed the appointment to him, ought to know that a Chateaubriand might employ a tutor, but could not conceivably act as one. But the reason for his bitterness was that the iron had entered into his own soul. He had been a master in "Brightly's school"; he had given French lessons in the houses of neighbouring gentry; he had been known to his pupils as "Mons. Shatterbrains." The local traditions to this effect are quite conclusive.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Still more conclusive is the following letter to a Dr. Davey of Beccles, which has lately been recovered:—

"Greville Street, Holborn, no. 15, London, 16 Jan., 1797.

"Dear Sir,

"You could not fancy how many times I reproached myself with not writing to you, but if you knew how much burried in papers I am now printing, runing from booksellers to booksellers, cursing a thousand people that call upon me, you no doubt would excuse and pity me. The gentleman who shall deliver you this letter is a cousin of mine called M. Feron; he is gone to Beccles to occupy my place. Should you be so kind to help him in many little things he may be a stranger to, you will oblige me very much. I myself shall soon return among you again. I am now very ill, but as I give up all sort of teaching, I shall be able, when at Beccles, to follow a regular course of physics, and I am not without hope that, by next summer, you will make of me one of the strongest man in England.

"Excuse my french scribbling and receive the assurance of all the gratitude with which I remain, dear sir, your very very humble obedient servant,

"CHATEAUBRIAND.

"My cousin is lodged in my apartment at Butcher's."

The letter, with all its faults of orthography preserved, was printed by M. Anatole Le Braz in the *Revue de Paris* of August 15, 1907.

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There are, or were until lately, people still living who had known his pupils.

For a tutor, however, he was extremely well received. The bracing air of the east coast restored his shattered health, and, as he made himself agreeable, he was invited to many of the best houses. One house in which he was specially made welcome was that of Mr. Ives, the incumbent of Saint Margaret's, Ilketshall, near Bungay—about five miles from Beccles—"a great Hellenist and mathematician," we read, "and one who drank in the old-fashioned English style."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Ives and his young French visitor used, in this old-fashioned English style, to sit for two hours over their wine, after dinner, talking of Homer and Sir Isaac Newton, and their foreign travels and the North-West Passage.<sup>2</sup> Then, when they joined the ladies for tea in the drawing-room, Mr. Ives used to go to sleep in his arm-chair, and Mrs. Ives to busy herself with needle-work, while their daughter, Miss Charlotte Ives, whose tutor he was, sang, and Chateaubriand turned over the leaves of her music. Or else, when the music had lulled the elders to their slumbers, the young people talked in whispers, of France, of literature, of themselves, of one another.

He had come to Beccles—and Bungay—under the

<sup>1</sup> There is a local tradition to the effect that he once drank against the Duke of Norfolk for a wager. Bottle after bottle of port disappeared, and when the Duke was under the table, the clergyman rose, rang the bell, and called for a tumbler of brandy-and-water, "hot and stiff." Mr. Rider Haggard tells the story in his *Farmer's Year*.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Ives had himself travelled in America, and it was probably in his library that Chateaubriand found the books of travel from which he borrowed freely, without acknowledgment, in his narrative of his own peregrinations.

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assumed name of M. de Combourg.<sup>1</sup> He had acknowledged his real name when found in tears over the news of his brother's execution. But he had said nothing about Madame de Chateaubriand then languishing in prison at Rennes. Nothing had happened to suggest the topic. No doubt it seemed irrelevant at a time when, as he says, he "felt the bashful charms of an attachment of the soul." And so, for a season, he fled the time carelessly.

The next thing was that Chateaubriand borrowed a horse and fell off it at Mr. Ives's door. He was taken in, and put to bed, and nursed; and nothing could have pleased him better: "If any one had told me that I was to spend the remainder of my days, unknown to the world, in the bosom of this solitary household, I should have died of joy." So he continued to say nothing about Madame Chateaubriand languishing in her prison, but accepted the good gifts which the gods bestowed; and then the situation developed according to the rules. Miss Charlotte Ives "changed her manner," after the way of maidens whose lovers are dilatory in declaration. "She became reserved; she ceased to offer me flowers for my button-hole; she would no longer sing to me. It was very puzzling," thought Chateaubriand. What could it all mean?

There was, indeed, no doubt whatever what it meant. Mrs. Ives understood, even if Chateaubriand, being young and inexperienced, did not. She under-

<sup>1</sup> The archives of Beccles contain a letter, published by M. Le Braz in the *Revue de Paris*, in which M. de Combourg "presents his compliments to Miss Sparrow" and proceeds to interpret the characters of a number of young ladies from their handwriting.

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stood, and she approved. She conferred with Mr. Ives, and Mr. Ives said that he was quite of her opinion. They would raise no obstacles, they agreed ; the course of true love should run smoothly, so far as they were concerned, and, as the handsome young stranger seemed afraid to speak, he should be spoken to. So one day, when dinner was over, Mr. Ives, instead of passing the bottle, rose and left the room, and Miss Charlotte Ives followed him dutifully with drooped eyes ; and Mrs. Ives and Chateaubriand were left *tête-à-tête*. He was expecting admonitions and reproaches—expecting to be told that he was a penniless adventurer who had presumed upon hospitality. But not at all. Mrs. Ives blushed, and then—

“Sir,” she said, “you have seen my confusion. I do not know what may be your feelings towards Charlotte, but the eyes of a mother cannot be deceived. My daughter is certainly in love with you. Mr. Ives and I have talked the matter over. You suit us in every respect, and we believe that you will make our daughter happy. You are without a country ; you have lost your relatives ; your property has been sold. There is no reason, then, why you should return to France. While waiting to recover your inheritance, you shall live with us.”

Chateaubriand wept. “I threw myself,” he says, “at Mrs. Ives’s feet, and covered her hands with my kisses and my tears.” Mrs. Ives jumped to the conclusion that the tears were tears of joy. She sobbed responsively, and rose, and reached out her hand for the bell-rope, meaning to summon Charlotte and Mr.



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Ives to a tender scene of family rejoicing. And then—

“Stop, madam,” I cried. “One moment, I beg of you. I am a married man.” She fell in a fainting-fit upon the floor.

And that was all, and it was on the floor that Chateaubriand left his hostess. He did not dash cold water in her face, nor call the servants, nor run for brandy or smelling-salts. He did not communicate with Mr. Ives ; he did not even wait to pack his traps. He took “French leave”—departed, as the French say, *à l’Anglaise*—walked all the way from Bungay to Beccles, presumably in evening dress, and engaged a seat in the coach that was just starting for London, leaving his luggage behind him, and never even, so far as one knows, giving an address to which it could be forwarded.

Such was his first serious love affair, and it cannot be said that he comes out of it otherwise than badly ; for he admits that Charlotte Ives had questioned him discreetly about his family affairs, and that he had returned evasive answers, saying nothing about the wife he had left behind him, but giving the impression that he was a bachelor and eligible. But he was none the less most seriously enamoured. “I cursed,” he writes, “my marriage which had ‘side-tracked’ me, and so deprived me of happiness.” He cherished the idea of wandering back to Bungay, and hiding behind a hedge, that he might peep unseen at Charlotte “on her way to church” ; “a hundred times,” he tells

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us, he was on the point of doing so. He also wrote long letters to Charlotte, though he tore them up instead of posting them ; and her image haunted him in his despair. "It was at this time that the mad ideas depicted in *René* assailed my heart, making me the most miserable of men."

But then, just because he was—or was to be—a literary artist, the torturing memory became a stimulus and an inspiration. "I felt that, if I could only win renown, the Ives family would be less disposed to regret the interest which it had taken in me. Charlotte presided over my studies." And so he resumed his studies, finished and arranged for the publication of his *Essai sur les Révolutions*," which appeared, in England, in 1797.

It was a crude work. Abbé Sieyès described it, in a letter to Roederer, as a "hotch-potch of philosophical pretentiousness." Its author, indeed, proved himself to have acquired a considerable mass of undigested learning ; but he had not yet found his point of view. The Chateaubriand who counts is the man of the Catholic and monarchical reaction ; the Chateaubriand of the *Essai* had not yet broken with the eighteenth century. He was always a monarchist, indeed—a Breton could hardly fail to be that—though his attitude towards kings was always that of a disdainful patron rather than a loyal subject ; but he was at this stage a freethinker, imbued with the ideas of the philosophers—more deeply imbued with them even than he permitted to appear. The proof is in a copy of the *Essai*, annotated in his own handwriting, for a long time in the possession of Sainte-Beuve, and bought back by the Chateaubriand family, at the sale of Sainte-Beuve's library, for £120.

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Wherever the text of the *Essai* is daring, the marginal notes put the dots on the i's. We read in the book, for instance, that "God, matter, and destiny are one"; and a note adds: "This is my system; this is what I believe." A little further we find a comment on the doctrine of the fall of man, with the marginal gloss: "This objection is irrefutable, and completely demolishes the whole edifice of Christian doctrine. But in any case it is a doctrine which no one believes in now." And so forth. Chateaubriand said a good deal that was unchristian, and meant more than he said. His pious Breton relatives were pained; and the opinion of his friends among the *émigrés* was by no means unanimously enthusiastic.

His book, however, attracted some attention, and made him "almost a personage" in the French colony—which was what he chiefly wanted. Presumably, too, it brought him a little money. He moved to better lodgings, in the neighbourhood of Hampstead, and mixed with more distinguished people. He names, among others, the Comte de Montlosier, the Chevalier de Panat, Abbé Delille, Abbé Carron, who afterwards wrote the life of his sister Julie, the Duchesse de Gontaut and Madame de Boigne, and Christian de Lamoignon; and he tells us he was admitted to the salon of Madame Lindsay—the "last of the Ninons," as he calls her—who was, at a later date, to be one of the mistresses of Benjamin Constant. There were some among his new friends who divined that distinction was in store for him. "He will go farther than any of us," said some one who had already gone some distance.

He had some thought, at this time, of living, as

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Rousseau liked to live, in the corner of a protector's park in Suffolk. A note to that effect appears, in the midst of theological commentaries, in the annotated copy of the *Essai* above referred to—

“ I might live happily at a very trifling cost. It is only a question of finding somebody who would be willing to put me up in the country. I could arrange to pay for my board after the war was over. There I could botanize, and write, and go for walks at my leisure, provided that I was not obliged to keep any one company, but was left free to live in my own wild way.”

A curious scheme, but one, it appears, which was very nearly realized—

“ Mr. Beding proposed to let me have a little temple in his own grounds ; but his house was one in which too many visitors are received. I should have been beleaguered there by importunate callers. Besides, the women in that set have no common-sense. They are ignorant and ill-bred. So the plan did not suit me. I want a more obscure and tranquil retreat, among simple, amiable people, not among ‘ grandees.’ ”

The influence, not only of the eighteenth century in general, but of Jean-Jacques in particular, is very visible in that aspiration ; but nothing came of it, and we have no means of knowing how far it was seriously entertained. Chateaubriand continued to live pretty much as before, mixing in the society that was open to him, making an impression there by his strong,



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original, gloomy, disdainful personality, indifferent as ever to the fortunes of Madame de Chateaubriand, now released from her prison, grieving as ever for the loss of Charlotte Ives, "wearing his heart," as an Irish girl told him, "in a sling," yet gradually living down the sentimental trouble which he thus persisted in nursing. And then things began to happen.

M. de Fontanes, with whom he had a slight acquaintance, arrived in London, and Chateaubriand became intimate with him. A letter from his sister gave him the unexpected news of his mother's death, startled him in the midst of his scepticism, and made him doubtful of his doubts. He wept, and was converted and resolved to chant his palinode—the palinode which was to take æsthetic shape, and win wide celebrity, as *Le Génie du Christianisme*.

Which is to say that the real Chateaubriand—the devout voluptuary—the Catholic Childe Harold, with a dash, and perhaps rather more than a dash, of Don Juan—was beginning to find himself at last.

## CHAPTER VII

Chateaubriand's conversion—Commencement of *Le Génie du Christianisme*—Difficulties in his version of the story—The advice of Dulau—The influence of Fontanes—Original title of *Le Génie du Christianisme*—Last years in London—The return to Paris.

CHATEAUBRIAND'S conversion appeared to him in retrospect to have been as sudden—and as dramatic—as the conversion of Saint Paul.

His sister Julie—Madame de Farcy—wrote to tell him of his mother's death. Once frivolous and worldly, Julie had found religion during the agonies of the Terror; and therefore her melancholy piece of news was followed by this exhortation—

“If only you knew how many tears your errors have caused our excellent mother to shed, and how deplorable they seem to every one who reflects and makes profession not only of piety but of reason; if you knew that, the knowledge would perhaps help to open your eyes and make you resolve that you would write no more.”

England and France being then at war, communication between the two countries was slow and difficult. Letters had, as a rule, to be sent to Hamburg to be forwarded, and there was often considerable

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delay in their transmission. Consequently, as we read in the preface of *Le Génie du Christianisme*—

“By the time this letter had crossed the seas and been delivered to me, my sister herself had ceased to live; she had died as the result of her sufferings during her imprisonment. These two voices speaking from the grave—this death bringing the tidings of death—impressed my imagination. I became a Christian. I did not yield, I admit, to any shining supernatural light. My conviction came to me from my heart. I wept and I believed.”

Only, of course, the voices of faith and conscience thus awakened by no means echoed Madame de Farcy's advice to Chateaubriand to “write no more.” The impulse—the inevitable impulse of a writer—was to expiate his errors not by silence, but by speech: to write more—and at once—in order to retract and contradict himself and correct his philosophic sophisms. And that is what Chateaubriand did, setting to work without delay upon the book which we know as *Le Génie du Christianisme*, labouring at it “with the ardour of a son who would build his mother a mausoleum.”

There is, one notes, no mention in all that of that other Madame de Chateaubriand who was his wife. On the contrary, he expressly tells us that his “kindling inspiration” was “the recollection of Charlotte”—Charlotte to whom he had made love, forgetting to inform her that he was a married man. And he was further inspired, he adds, by “my title which immediately occurred to me,” and “the ambition

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of glory which stimulated my exalted imagination": "I wanted," he concludes, "to make a great noise in the world, that my mother might hear of me in heaven, and that the angels might lay my holy expiation at her feet."

The epithet "holy," it must be allowed, does not follow very aptly upon the sentimental allusion to a married man's amours, though it is characteristic of Chateaubriand, who was now beginning to be what he always continued to be—the devout voluptuary and the voluptuous saint; but that is not the only criticism that can be passed upon his story. A more effective criticism is to the effect that it is untrue.

It is untrue that Chateaubriand was inspired by his title, for he did not think of the title until after he had finished the book; and it is not true that Chateaubriand was moved to write the book by the news of his mother's death, for the first draft of his manuscript was nearly completed when he received that news. That can be proved to demonstration by the dated correspondence.

Madame de Farcy died on July 22, 1799. Chateaubriand could not possibly have heard of her death before the beginning of August. On August 19 he wrote a letter to Madame de Fontanes in which he stated that a volume of 430 pages "concerning the Christian religion in its relation to morality and the Fine Arts" is at the printer's. The length of time, therefore, in which Chateaubriand claims to have planned his masterpiece, "taken Hebrew lessons, consulted libraries and learned men, roamed in the country wrapped in meditation," and written 430



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pages, appears, upon analysis, to have been somewhere between a fortnight and three weeks. Which is absurd ; so that his story of the conception and execution of *Le Génie du Christianisme* must take its place with legends.

An alternative story was current among Chateaubriand's detractors, and was repeated by Napoleon at St. Helena. The conversion of Chateaubriand, according to that version, was due to the worldly counsel of Dulau the bookseller.

Dulau, it is related, was disappointed with the sales of the *Essai* ; so he sent for Chateaubriand and told him so, and also told him why. Eighteenth-century philosophy, Dulau said, was played out. The writer who wanted to succeed must look for his readers in the opposite camp. And Chateaubriand was impressed by the advice, and acted on it.

It may have happened so ; for some booksellers and even some publishers, looking at literature from the commercial point of view, are a little prone to talk to authors in that tone ; and authors eager for success—especially young authors in a hurry for success—are more than a little apt to listen to them. The whole of the truth, however, is no more likely to be contained in the second story than in the first ; and the link between the two stories is probably to be found in the renewal of Chateaubriand's acquaintance with Fontanes.

Fontanes had already trodden in his quiet way the path which Chateaubriand was to tread with more sublime solemnity. He had been a philosopher—a

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Voltairean—and the Revolution had disgusted him with philosophy. He had fallen under the influence of Joubert—the idle aphorist whose pungent sayings have been made known to English readers by Matthew Arnold's eulogies and Mrs. Humphry Ward's translation. He and Joubert had tried to start a literary magazine together, and he had travelled in England to canvass, not very successfully, for subscribers. Joubert had found him a wife, though he already had a mistress—a Madame Dufresnoy, whom Chateaubriand had once met at his house at dinner. His habits were voluptuous, but his letters to Joubert were full of pious sentiments. "Believe me," he wrote, on hearing the news of his father's death, "it is only with God's help that we can console ourselves for our sorrows. Every passing day brings me the conviction that this is a belief that it is necessary to live with." And also: "Men need religion; otherwise all is lost."

That was the religious system—piety without Puritanism—which Fontanes brought to London on his second visit. It was just the sort of religious system—a religious system that did not interfere unduly with a man's private life—that Chateaubriand, living apart from his wife, and in love with Charlotte Ives, was then in the mood to adopt. He wanted a consoling faith which carried no uncomfortable obligation in the way of works, self-denials, or austerities; and Fontanes could supply him with it. They were constantly together during Fontanes' sojourn, exploring London and the suburbs, talking of literature, of France, of common friends, of whatever deeper thoughts were stirring in their minds. They read the *Essai* together, and talked of that. Fontanes, who was nine

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years Chateaubriand's elder, admired but disapproved. He was quite of Dulau's opinion, though for different reasons, that Chateaubriand had better desert philosophy and address himself to the religious public. We may take it that both influences, and both reasons, had their weight; and that the news of Madame de Chateaubriand's death only set the seal of tears, and in some degree of sincerity, upon a conversion already half-effected from more or less interested motives.

We have, indeed, only to turn to the letters to see the process of conversion passing through these stages, and a change in the writer's point of view reflected in a change in the title of his book.

The first letter which concerns us is addressed to Madame Fontanes. It is a dry business letter, relating chiefly to dates of publication and the price—one hundred and sixty louis—which Chateaubriand asks for his manuscript. He gives the book the title cited above: "Concerning the Christian religion in its relation to morality and the Fine Arts." In a second letter, written a little later to her husband, he calls it: "Concerning the poetical and moral beauties of the Christian religion and its superiority to all other cults." The second title certainly has the air of taking religion more seriously than the former; and many passages in the letter bear witness to the writer's spiritual progress. Egoism, indeed, remains; but faith illuminates it. Chateaubriand has begun to believe in God as well as in himself. He is persuaded that God, moving in His mysterious way, has worked a wonder in order to touch his heart.

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“God,” he writes, “perceiving that my heart did not walk in the evil paths of ambition, and was indifferent to the abominations of the lust for gold, knew how to strike and how to move me. He understood, having moulded the clay, what was the strength and what the weakness of His handiwork. He knew that I loved my relatives, and was proud of them to the point of vanity ; and therefore he deprived me of them that I might lift up my eyes to Him. God and you shall henceforward divide my thoughts, and such gifts as He has bestowed upon me shall, for the future, be consecrated to His glory.”

God, that is to say, has chastened him whom He loved—vicariously—and has shortened the days of two devout women, His faithful servants, in order that their son and brother—a sinner who is also a man of genius—may be brought kneeling to the throne of grace. That is the unctuous thesis, and Chateaubriand maintains it with unction and conviction, and with the air of a man who pats Divine Providence approvingly on the back. Divine Providence, he seems to say, did well, and there should indeed be joy in heaven over the sinner who not only repented, but also wrote *Le Génie du Christianisme* ; and so, confusing his memories in his survey, he crystallizes the story of his conversion in the graphic phrase : “ I wept and I believed.”

Chateaubriand's new-born faith, however, was not to bring him fame immediately. Difficulties arose, delaying the publication of his new book in France ; and he was to spend yet another eighteen months in



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comparative poverty in exile—partly in London and partly in the suburbs.

In Hyde Park, he tells us, he often caught a glimpse of Pitt, who “cast a disdainful glance” at him and the *émigrés*, his companions, and “walked on with his nose in the air.” He rambled out to Harrow, where Byron, he reminds us, was then at school—Byron<sup>1</sup> whose personality, he insisted, was an unscrupulous plagiarism of his own. He took rooms at Richmond for the summer, and visited Kew Gardens to see the newly-imported kangaroos, and, at Strawberry Hill, was picked up by his old friend Peltier, who took him for a driving tour in the Thames valley. At Slough he saw Herschel and his telescope. At Windsor he bribed a servant to hide him so that he could see the King.<sup>2</sup> At Blenheim he heard the news of Nelson’s victory in Aboukir Bay. Elsewhere he meditated in a country churchyard, and made a translation of Gray’s “Elegy.” And so the time passed until he was advised that he would run no great risk if he returned to France.

He had, he says, no overwhelming desire to do so. Death had severed the closest of his family ties. “Divinities more powerful than those of the paternal hearth”—another allusion, one can not help guessing, to his hopeless passion for Charlotte Ives—

<sup>1</sup> Byron, while still at Harrow, wrote him a letter which he neglected to answer; and he believed that Byron, for that reason, deliberately refrained from acknowledging his indebtedness to his inspiration.

<sup>2</sup> He speaks of the King as then “blind and mad,” but George III did not become either mad or blind until many years later. Probably, therefore, his story is another figment, based on a passage in Fanny Burney’s *Diary*.

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“detained me where I was”; and, as for his wife: “My young *widow* only knew me through a union of a few months’ duration, through misfortune, and through eight years’ absence.” But, on the other hand, the general stream of the *émigrés* was flowing homewards; and so Chateaubriand, exhorted by Fontanes, flowed with it. He obtained a Prussian passport in the assumed name of La Sagne, an alleged citizen of Neuchatel, and crossed to Calais in May 1800.

It was not Madame de Chateaubriand, but Madame Lindsay, who was waiting for him on the quay. He did not turn aside to visit Madame de Chateaubriand, but drove straight on to Paris in the carriage of the “last of the Ninons,” who put him up for the night, and then engaged him a poor room in a cheap inn, whence he wrote to Fontanes to come and see him.

The manuscript which was to make his fame and fortune was in his trunk; but, otherwise, he was destitute. He had to appeal to Fontanes not only to visit him, but to help him:—

“Pray render me two services:

“In the first place send me a doctor.

“In the second place try to lend me twenty-five louis.

“I have heard bad news from my family, and do not know how I am to get along until Migneret<sup>1</sup> makes my fortune. It is very hard that I should have to be uneasy as to my means of livelihood while I am doing the Lord’s work. . . . Get me out of the mess if you can. Twenty-five louis will enable me to live until

<sup>1</sup> His publisher.

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the publication of the book which is to decide my fate. Then the book will pay for everything, if that be the will of God who, up to the present, has not treated me very well.

“Always yours,

“LA SAGNE.”







*Pauline de Beaumont*

*Portrait by the artist of the artist (engraving)*

## CHAPTER VIII

Chateaubriand in Paris—His destitution—Introduction to Joubert—Revision of *Le Génie du Christianisme* at Joubert's advice—Pauline de Beaumont—Her relations with Joubert—Her salon—Her interest in Chateaubriand—He accepts her invitation to live with her at Savigny.

AN anecdote in the *Mémoires* illustrates the destitution attested by the letter to Fontanes quoted in the last chapter.

Walking about Paris, Chateaubriand came to a church which the Jacobins had turned into a place of profane entertainment. The announcement of "free admission" tempted him to enter. Acrobats were giving a performance on the tight-rope, and he sat down to look at them; but when a waiter came round with a tray, calling upon the spectators to "give their orders," he was obliged to get up and go. "I actually had not a penny," he writes, "with which to pay for my refreshments."

His friends, however, came to the rescue. Fontanes was an editor, and could employ him on the *Mercure de France*. His publisher was persuaded to advance him a small sum on account of his forthcoming book. It was arranged that he should live provisionally with Joubert, about whom a word or two may now be said.

He has already been introduced as an aphorist, but

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his aphorisms were not, in fact, published until after his death.<sup>1</sup> For his contemporaries at this period he was merely a man of culture living on his means. Before the Revolution he had been, for a brief while, first a school-master and then a country magistrate; but he had abandoned both occupations, and now divided his time between Paris and his country place at Villeneuve-sur-Yonne, reading, meditating, talking, and now and again, with grave wisdom, putting an aphorism on paper. Fourteen years older than Chateaubriand, he had sat, in his youth, at the feet of Diderot; but he had reverted from philosophy to Christianity, not with the enthusiasm of the neophyte, but with the solemnity of the sage. His friends—and he had many friends—esteemed him “the most amiable of eccentrics”; and his most remarkable eccentricity was his habit of Bowdlerizing his books. He used to tear out of them, and destroy, all the pages containing sentiments which he could not endorse, so that, in the end, he possessed a large but mutilated library, mainly composed of loose covers flapping about a few scattered sheets of text. Such was the man who now “took up” Chateaubriand, and collaborated with Fontanes in giving him good advice.

Fontanes and he were Chateaubriand's literary godfathers. Their attitude towards him suggests two school-masters coaching a clever boy for a Balliol scholarship. They do not seem to have regarded him as in any sense a rival. They were clever, but they knew their limitations, and had no expectation of ever setting the Seine on fire. On the other hand, they

<sup>1</sup> Chateaubriand edited them. He died in 1824.

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felt that Chateaubriand, if rightly guided, might go anywhere and do anything. He was their "dark horse" whom they had "spotted" and would back, sure to win the race for fame—"Eclipse first and the rest nowhere"—if only they trained him for it properly and allowed no premature dissipation of his powers, but held him back until his hour was come and then launched him with *éclat*. They devoted all their care and all their energies to that.

They told him, first of all, that *Le Génie du Christianisme*, rich in promise as it was, must be rewritten. He accepted the decision with docility, and they stood over him, criticizing and encouraging, while he performed his task. He had meant to break with the eighteenth century, and thought that he had done so; but they showed him that he had not. "We must wash him clean," wrote Joubert, "of Rousseau, of Ossian, of the fogs of the Thames, of his revolutions ancient and modern, and leave him only the Cross, the Missions, the Ocean sunsets, and the American savannas. Then we shall see what a poet will arise to purify France from the mess of the Directorate, even as Epimenides, with his sacred rites and his poems, purified Athens from the plague." And Fontanes warned him: "It is open to you to place yourself at the head of the century that is now dawning, and, instead of that, you are hanging on to the skirts of the century that is coming to an end." He did not argue the point, but did as he was told; and then, as if to reward him for his obedience, his friends procured him a new source of inspiration by presenting him to Madame de Beaumont.



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Pauline de Beaumont was by birth a Montmorin—a descendant of the François de Montmorin, Governor of Auvergne, who, at the time of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, wrote Charles IX the memorable letter: “Sire, I have received your Majesty’s order to arrange that all the Protestants in my province shall be murdered. I respect your Majesty too much not to believe the order to be forged; and if—which God forbid—it be not forged, then I respect your Majesty too much to obey him.” Her father, the Comte de Montmorin, had been French Ambassador at Madrid, and Foreign Minister in Necker’s Administration. She and her husband, Comte Louis de Beaumont, whom she married when a mere child, had long since ceased to live together, or even to communicate; and all the fault, by all the accounts, was on his side, though he was the nephew of an Archbishop.<sup>1</sup>

Fate had been very cruel to her during the Terror. Her father was one of the victims of the September massacres; his body was impaled and carried in triumph to the National Assembly. Her mother and her brother perished on the scaffold on the day of the execution of Madame Elizabeth. Her sister, thrown into prison with them, only escaped the same fate by declaring herself *enceinte*, and so being allowed to live till Thermidor released her. She herself was arrested when they were at the Château de Passy, in the dead of winter; but she was ill and an encumbrance, so the Republican commissioners turned her out of the carriage and left her by the wayside in the snow.

<sup>1</sup> Of Christophe de Beaumont, Archbishop of Paris, whom Rousseau demolished in controversy.

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It was impossible for her to return to her home, for the seals of the Republic were affixed to the doors and barred the entrance ; so she wandered helplessly until, at last, she found shelter with a vine-dresser named Paquereau, who had once been one of her father's servants. For several months she lived in his cottage—ill in bed most of the time—raising small sums of money for her more urgent needs by sending a few articles of jewellery to be sold at Sens. Joubert was living in the neighbourhood at the time, with nothing to do, as usual, except to look on at life, and criticize it, and seek out new friends and serve them. The story of her distress reached him. He knocked at the door of the cottage, and offered her a shelter in his house. She declined that offer, fearing that she might be a dangerous guest, and not wishing to alarm Madame Joubert ; but at least she was no longer quite alone in the world. She had a new friend, whose friendship was only to grow in the subsequent years of comparative prosperity and calm.

The friendship was a great event—perhaps, if we knew the truth, the greatest of all events—in Joubert's life. He was not quite a gentleman, according to the estimates of the period, by birth or up-bringing ; and his wife was homely. Pauline de Beaumont was a great lady, intellectual as well as charming, gifted with all the graces of the *ancien régime*. She descended like an angel from heaven upon his homely hearth, causing him to realize how very homely it was. Probably the *liaison* that ensued was only intellectual. Joubert was that sort of man ; but still——

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Madame Joubert, writes Mrs. Humphry Ward, "knew neither selfish passions nor small jealousies"; and that, on the whole, was fortunate for the peace of the household. The aphorist was at least guilty of intellectual infidelity; and some of his aphorisms about his wife which appear in his letters to other ladies would hardly have pleased her if she had been aware of them. "I knew that she had merit and some charms," he wrote. "The charms are gone; the merit remains." And he also apologized for her to Madame de Beaumont, saying, "I count on your discernment to discover the feelings and the merit which she has the bad habit of not showing enough." An attachment, albeit only intellectual, must have gone rather far when it finds expression in such aphorisms uttered in such circumstances; and there are a few letters which, if when reading them we read between the lines, do seem to indicate——

Those letters, however, belong to a later date, and we shall come to them in due course. For the moment, the intellectual passion was unruffled, and even in some degree returned. Religion was mixed up with it; religion nearly always was mixed with the affections, whether intellectual or carnal, of these Catholic reactionaries of the early days of the nineteenth century. Apparently it made little difference to them. They behaved in temporal matters very much like the philosophers of old, though they found comfort in envisaging things spiritual differently. It was thus, at any rate, with Pauline de Beaumont and her friends.

Her conversion to Catholicism did not hinder her from divorcing her husband, though divorce is

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forbidden to Catholics ; and her Catholic friends did not criticize her action otherwise than by continuing to call her Madame de Beaumont after she had obtained her decree. Then—or perhaps a little sooner—she returned to Paris, and opened her salon in the Rue Neuve de Luxembourg.

The word “salon,” however, must not mislead us. To an English reader it probably suggests grandeur and glittering lights, glorious apparel and sparkling jewellery, a fashionable mob on a wide staircase, powdered footmen bawling the names of guests, a weary hostess interminably shaking hands with a long procession of people whom she scarcely knows by sight. There was no such display, and no such crush in the salon of Madame de Beaumont. She merely received a few friends every night in her “apartment,” without luxury or ostentation. They came, not to flirt, nor to play cards, nor to show themselves and pass on to some other entertainment, but to talk.

We have had many salons in England—Lady Holland’s, Lady Blessington’s, George Eliot’s, Mrs. Grote’s—but never a salon at once so distinguished and so simple. Our clever women have been too Sibylline, and too fond of homage ; our pretty women too anxious each to monopolize a man ; our frivolous women too ready to interrupt the play of wit with irrelevant observations ; our dull women too reluctant to be left at home. Again and again these difficulties have perplexed and baffled the English *salonnière* ; but they seem to have been quite inoperative when Madame de Beaumont “received” in Paris.



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The homely Madame Joubert, for instance, did not always accompany her husband, the aphorist, to the receptions, which would, no doubt, have bored her; and no offence was taken when brilliant ladies were invited to come without their husbands. The occasional guests included Madame de Staël, her cousin, Madame Necker de Saussure, and Madame de Vintimille. The regular attendants, who seldom missed an evening, were Joubert, Fontanes, and MM. de Bonald,<sup>1</sup> Molé,<sup>2</sup> Pasquier,<sup>3</sup> and Chênedollé.<sup>4</sup> They assembled regularly in their hostess's dimly-lighted drawing-room, for no other purpose, as has been said, than to talk brilliantly about religion, politics, literature and the drama; and the day came when Fontanes—or perhaps it was Joubert—brought and introduced his young *protégé*, Chateaubriand.

They had already spoken to her of him as the young man of genius who was about to put the philosophers to shame and restore religion with a blare of trumpets; and he looked the part and could sustain it. He was thirty-two, broad-shouldered, handsome, with a head that was by universal testimony “magnificent.” His voice was rich and sympathetic; his smile, when he chose to smile, was “irresistible.” His broad brow bore the stamp of intellect; and melancholy—the disdainful melancholy of the proud

<sup>1</sup> A Catholic reactionary, author of *Théorie du pouvoir politique et religieux dans la Société Civile*, made a Minister of State at the Restoration.

<sup>2</sup> A Cabinet Minister under Louis-Philippe.

<sup>3</sup> Foreign Minister when Chateaubriand was Minister at Berlin.

<sup>4</sup> A poet, author of *Le Génie de l'homme*, a work not without merit though it made no mark. He ultimately, thanks to Fontanes, became a School Inspector at Caen.

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man whom fate has persecuted—had marked him for its own. He instinctively struck the pose, in short, of *l'homme fatal*. Napoleon, indeed, with his cynical way of putting things, declared at a later day that he looked like “a conspirator who had come down the chimney”; but Madame de Beaumont did what the Englishwomen in Kensington Gardens had failed to do—she “divined the invisible presence of René.”

René, from the very first, was favoured beyond her other guests—beyond even Joubert, who, until then, had been favoured above the rest. The aphorist was, after all, an aphorist, and was some fifteen years her elder, and lived with the wife for whom he apologized to her. She was deeply grateful to him, and very much attached to him; but still—— She was thirty, and she had never loved, and now——

She knew, of course, that Chateaubriand was married. Though he had concealed the fact from Charlotte Ives, he did not conceal it from her. Since everybody in Paris knew it, he could hardly have done so if he had wished, and perhaps he did not wish. But Madame de Chateaubriand was in Brittany; and Brittany was a long way from Paris; and Chateaubriand had not seen his wife for ten years, and did not seem to wish to see her; and Madame de Beaumont, knowing Chateaubriand, and having fallen under the spell of “the Enchanter,” as they all called him, concluded that there were reasons for this of which he was too chivalrous to speak. What else could she conclude when he told her that he hoped to restore religion in France? Moreover, she was in the grip of a disease<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> She was in consumption.

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which does not spare ; and, knowing that she had not long to live, she wanted to love and be loved before she had to die. This was her chance, and she snatched at it.

In order to be near Chateaubriand, she stayed in Paris at seasons of the year when it was her general custom to go into the country ; and she was always at home to him when she was at home to no one else. The others, including Joubert, came to see her, at the most, only once a day ; but he came twice. In the evenings he joined in the general talk in the salon, or read the burning pages of *Atala* and *René* to an applauding company ; but in the mornings and the afternoons he sat alone with her, exchanging confidences, hypnotizing her with his caressing voice, sympathizing with the sufferings which had left her almost alone in the world, telling her stories of his picturesque childhood in the solitary Breton castle, and speaking of that relentless ennui which had followed him like a shadow in his wanderings—mostly imaginary wanderings, as we have seen—on the shores of the Canadian lakes, “in the huts of the savages,” and on the still bosoms of the Floridan lagunes.

No doubt he was in love—he tells us so, and we may believe him. He was in love with her, though he was also in love with himself, and with the new attitude that he was striking. He did not foresee, for lovers never foresee—but that can wait.

And Pauline de Beaumont, it is equally apparent, was even more in love with him, loving him without “*arrière pensée*,” and without any thought of herself. She had never loved before, and she was too ill to

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flatter herself that she would ever love again. This was to be the one love of her life, and she must make the most of it ; and, in order that she might make the most of it, she and her lover must be alone. Not alone in the midst of the crowds of Paris, where they were daily interrupted by the claims of politeness and the salon, but alone in the country among woods and meadows. No one and nothing must stand in the way—neither Joubert, nor Madame de Chateaubriand, nor the fear of what people might say ; and she must make haste before her lover became too famous.

His fame was already beginning. A newspaper controversy with Madame de Staël, the details of which need not trouble us, had first caused him to be talked about ; and Madame de Staël had actually called on Madame de Beaumont to complain of the way in which Chateaubriand was treating her. Then he had published *Atala*, and readers had realized that a new sun was about to rise in the hemisphere of letters. *Le Génie du Christianisme* had been announced, and the world was eagerly waiting for it. Chateaubriand was rewriting it, as he had been told to do, under the critical eyes of Fontanes and Joubert. Might he not write faster—might he not also write better—in the quiet of the country, with only the woman who loved him by his side ?

So Madame de Beaumont argued ; and she planned her *coup*. She hired a furnished house for seven months at Savigny, and, in May 1801, carried Chateaubriand off there to live with her. He tells us, in the *Mémoires*, that he was there “with M. Joubert and our other friends” ; but that is not the case, as the correspondence with Joubert and the other friends most



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amply proves. A few of the friends, including Joubert and Chateaubriand's sister, Lucile, did pay them a visit ; but they did not remain very long. During the greater part of the seven months in which Chateaubriand was finishing his work on the genius of Christianity, he and Pauline de Beaumont were alone together—on their honeymoon ; and that was what Pauline de Beaumont had intended.

“Every morning,” she said to Madame de Vintimille, “I shall hear the sound of his voice ; and I shall sit and watch him while he works.”

## CHAPTER IX

Literary life at Savigny—Joubert's encouragement and advice—Fontanes' practical help—Publication of *Le Génie du Christianisme*—Contents and character of the work—Madame Hamelin's account of its enthusiastic reception—Chateaubriand "buried beneath a heap of perfumed notes."

SAVIGNY is in the Department of Seine-et-Oise, on the high-road to Paris. The house which Chateaubriand and Madame de Beaumont occupied there stands in a small park. Vine-clad terraces rise behind it, and a curtain of trees screens it. Some of the most glowing pages of the *Mémoires* are consecrated to Chateaubriand's recollections of his sojourn there—

"In the morning," he writes, "we used to breakfast together. After breakfast I used to withdraw to my work, and Madame de Beaumont was so good as to copy out for me the quotations which I indicated. This noble woman offered me a place of refuge when I had none. Had it not been for the tranquillity which she afforded me, I should very likely never have finished a work which I had failed to bring to completion in the days of my misfortunes.

"Never to the end of my life shall I forget certain of the evenings spent in this haven of friendship. We used to gather, when we returned from our daily walk, close to the pool of running water, situated in the

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midst of a lawn in the garden. Madame Joubert, Madame de Beaumont, and I sat side by side on a bench. Madame Joubert's son played on the grass at our feet. M. Joubert paced to and fro along a gravel path at a little distance from us."

M. Joubert might well do so, having discovered that two were company and that he was no longer one of the two; but his stay at Savigny was of brief duration. For the great part of the time Chateaubriand and Madame de Beaumont were alone, as honeymooners should be, and Chateaubriand kept ennui at bay and was happy. "What bliss," he exclaims, "for a man who had lately returned from exile, and who, save for a few days too quickly passed, had for eight years lived a life of complete isolation!" And then, with the inevitable touch of egotism: "Never have I depicted the wilderness of the New World so eloquently." And then, with the inevitable touch of sentiment—

"At night, when the windows of our rustic drawing-room were open, Madame de Beaumont used to point out the various constellations, telling me that, some day, I should remember that it was from her that I had learnt to know them. Since I have lost her, I have, again and again, at Rome, in the midst of the Campagna, looked for the stars whose names she taught me. I have seen them shining brightly above the Sabine Hills, their long rays smiting the surface of the Tiber."

Did he also, one wonders, search for them on those other nights, only a few years later, when at

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Fervacques——? But that is another of the questions that can wait. For the moment they were both happy and believed that their happiness would last; and Pauline de Beaumont even believed that her happiness was curing her malady. "I do really think," she wrote to Fontanes, "that my health is improving;" and her letters to Joubert are full of a delight as naïve and innocent as that of a bride.

"We have hardly been here four-and-twenty hours, and already I am impatient to tell you our news. No doubt you are more anxious to hear about the solitary one than about myself. You know how the country charms *me*, and how happy *I* am in solitude; so it is about the savage that I am going to talk to you.

"Almost before our journey was finished, he had forgotten his talks with Fontanes, and all his anxieties and annoyances. Never have I seen him more calm, more gay, more child-like, more reasonable. . . . By ten o'clock the whole household was in bed and fast asleep.

"This morning the savage read me the first part of his first volume, pointing out the changes that he had to make in it. In truth I hope he may find critics cooler-headed and more enlightened than I am; for I, for my part, cannot escape from the spell, and am even less severe than he is himself."

And then again, thanking Joubert, on Chateaubriand's behalf, for sending him a copy of an Italian translation of *Atala*—

"He glanced with delight at the Italian apparel of this daughter of his pen. It is a pleasure for which he



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is much indebted to you, but which he can only enjoy hastily, so deeply is he immersed in his work. He sacrifices his sleep and his meals to it, and can scarcely spare a moment to sigh for the happiness which he knows awaits him at Villeneuve. For the rest, I think he is to be congratulated on this species of intoxication which prevents him from feeling the void caused by your absence."

There is a mention in the same letter of the dispute between Chateaubriand and Madame de Staël, which Madame de Beaumont composed. The trouble broke out, she says, "at a time when we were leading a life so delightfully tranquil that we were meaning to settle down to it for ever"; and she adds, having told the story: "But we must not mind the worries of this world. We must look on at them only as we look on at the tempest from the shore, congratulating ourselves that its fury cannot harm us." And then elsewhere we read that "M. de Chateaubriand is working like a nigger," and that Madame de Beaumont will be very much obliged if Madame Joubert will buy her some teaspoons.

No doubt Madame Joubert bought them. Very likely she was grateful to Chateaubriand for removing and monopolizing the lady to whom her husband was accustomed to apologize for her own lack of charm. And the aphorist himself still gave no sign that his feelings were wounded by the preference shown to the younger and more distinguished man. We know that they were wounded—we shall come to the proof—but he did not wear his heart upon his sleeve. He was magnanimous; he lapsed, as it were, into the *rôle* of

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father-in-law, maintaining both his affection and his enthusiasm at the same pitch as before, prophesying smooth things while giving good advice. He implores Chateaubriand, for instance, not to be too unctuously religious—

“Let him accustom us once more to regard Christianity with some degree of favour, to breathe with some degree of pleasure the incense which it exhales to heaven, and to listen to its canticles with some degree of satisfaction. He will then have done the work that he is best capable of doing, and his task will have been fulfilled. Religion itself may be left to do the rest. If philosophy and poetry once bring a man back to it, it will soon lay hold of him, for its power of seduction is great.”

He appeals to him again not to rely too much upon the quotations which he is marshalling in such formidable array—

“Tell him that he is inclined to quote too much. Tell him that the public will care very little for his citations, but a great deal for his thoughts; that the world is curious, not about his knowledge but about his genius; that beauty, not truth, is what will be looked for in his work; that it is not his doctrines but his talents that will make his literary fortune; that Christianity will not make us like Chateaubriand, but that we rely upon Chateaubriand to make us love Christianity. He is quite different from the rest of our prose writers. Let him follow his *métier* and enchant us.”

If he does so, his success will not be doubtful—

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"I do not share your fears. That which is beautiful cannot fail to please. There is a Venus in his work, celestial for some of us, terrestrial for others, whose presence will be felt by all. Since the book is finished, the critical hour is passed. It will succeed because it is the work of the Enchanter. It must succeed, even if it had a thousand faults, because it also contains so many beauties. That is my verdict."

Such were the cheering messages that reached Chateaubriand as he "worked like a nigger" under Madame de Beaumont's devoted eyes; and his friends not only advised and applauded, but also circulated the puff preliminary, and pulled the wires.

Fontanes was even more useful in these respects than Joubert; for he was an editor, and was in the confidence of Napoleon, and on terms of close friendship with Napoleon's brother Lucien, and his sister, Madame Bacciochi. Chateaubriand was able to write letters on topics of the day to Fontanes' paper and subscribe himself "the author of *Le Génie du Christianisme*" while his work was still in the printer's hands. His editor never lost an opportunity of referring to him, in various connections, as "the author of the long expected volume on the beauties of the Christian religion," etc. The First Consul himself was approached and persuaded that here was a valuable literary ally—an enthusiastic exponent, worth humouring and favouring, of the new policy of reconciliation between France and Rome.

The Peace of Amiens had just been signed, and negotiations were proceeding with the Pope for the

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conclusion of the Concordat. It was arranged that *Le Génie du Christianisme* should be issued on the morrow of the publication of that instrument, that its author should be put forward as the man of genius who was on the side of the angels, and that Fontanes' eulogy of it should be reproduced, with the *imprimatur* of the Government in the *Moniteur*. Those were the auspicious circumstances in which, after much anxious thought and delicate negotiation, the brilliant Catholic apology was launched. It is the moment to pause and consider what manner of book it was.

Assuredly it was not a book to make any deep or permanent appeal to really religious people. It appeals to really religious Catholics as little as to really religious Protestants. Whether it is actually insincere is a point which may be, and has often been, debated. It certainly lacks "inwardness"; but those who knew Chateaubriand best will be most ready to maintain that this lack is itself a proof, for what it may be worth, of sincerity. The author, as his life shows, was more sentimental than pious; and it was natural and reasonable and proper that this distinction should be mirrored in his writings.

One may go further and say that Christianity, for Chateaubriand, was not a religion at all, but, as it were, a work of art. The contemplation of it never moved him, any more than the contemplation of a masterpiece of sculpture would have moved him, to the humble aspiration of Saint Thomas à Kempis: "*O utinam per unum diem in hoc mundo conversati essemus uti debemus.*" How should it, seeing that he, a married man, with a wife in Brittany, was living



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with a divorced woman while expounding the beauties of the Christian creed? He was not, as the world commonly understands the words, a religious man, but rather, as Sainte-Beuve puts it, "a voluptuary with a Catholic imagination." That was how he differed alike from his Catholic predecessors of the seventeenth century, and from those evangelical revivalists who were his contemporaries in England. He preached, it is instructive to remember, at pretty much the same date as Simeon and Legh Richmond; and what a difference between his preaching and theirs!

Religion, in the view of the English revivalists, was an intimate personal matter, and implied austere corollaries: the conviction of sin; the renewal of the heart; the renunciation of the pomps and vanities of this wicked world and all the sinful lusts of the flesh. There is nothing—absolutely nothing—of that sort in the attitude of the leader of the Catholic reaction in France. The imagination boggles, indeed, at the thought of Chateaubriand renouncing pomps, and, as for the sinful lusts of the flesh, few men have ever seemed less ashamed of their concessions to them. Such regrets as we shall find him expressing on this head are hardly to be distinguished from boasts; and the most that can be said of his fidelity to the law of Christ is that he was "faithful in his fashion"—which was not the fashion of the ascetics.

As for the "argument" of his great apologetic work, perhaps we may sum it up as follows—

Beauty is truth, truth beauty. Christianity—especially Catholic Christianity—is beautiful; therefore it is the only religion for a man of taste. Observe

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how beautiful it is in detail—in its dogmas and in its ceremonies! How beautiful are the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement! How beautiful is Extreme Unction! How beautiful are Baptism and the Supper of the Lord! What beautiful emotions steal over one in ruined cloisters and in cemeteries! What beautiful stories are told about Eremites and Cœnobites and missionaries and martyrs! How mysterious are mysteries, and how chaste is the chastity of nuns! How impressive is Gothic architecture! How marvellous is the effect of the setting sun shining through a stained glass window! How deep is the indebtedness to Catholicism of the arts of music, of painting, and even of literature! How great are Palestrina, and Michael Angelo, and Racine! How great then—how poetical and how philosophical—is the creed from which they all drew their inspiration!

The paragraph is not a parody of a summary. It is a fair and faithful summary. Chateaubriand, as we see, does not precisely reason or plead with the sinner, but talks to him like an art critic, endeavouring to work up enthusiasm for a neglected masterpiece. His words, indeed, seem to be meant, not for sinners, but for men of taste. The impression which they leave is of a man admiring a picture in a gallery—and not only admiring it, but striking attitudes in front of it—and not only striking attitudes, but observing the effect of them in the looking-glass. One feels that most unmistakably when one reads that “a man may have talent without religion, but it is very difficult for him to have genius”—a sentiment which has just as much truth as the opposing

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sentiment of Chateaubriand's contemporary Daunou,<sup>1</sup> that "genius can only spring in the breast of a Republican."

The Catholics of to-day—those of them who take their Catholicism seriously—do not set much store by the apologetics of *Le Génie du Christianisme*. "It is all useful, it goes in with the rest," is the most enthusiastic comment that one can extract from them. Which means—which can only mean—that the temporal glory of the Church of Saint Peter is an end in itself, and that no argument which has brought men and women to own allegiance to the Sovereign Pontiff is to be disdained merely because it happens to be unsound. But, if that be the modern view, the Catholics of Chateaubriand's own time did not share it. Their enthusiasm knew no bounds in its expression, and was qualified by no mental reservations.

It is true, of course, that the official Catholicism of France in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a very abominable thing. It had slaughtered the Huguenots in the streets of Paris; it had dragooned the Camisards in their mountain home; it had broken Calas—and many another—on the wheel. In another field of energy, it had driven Rousseau into exile, and had maliciously obstructed the scientific work of the Encyclopædists. Voltaire had had every warrant for his famous exhortation: "*Ecrasez l'infâme.*"

<sup>1</sup> A great savant. Before the Revolution a priest and school-master, he became first a member and then President of the Convention, and was the principal author of the Constitution of Year III.

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When Chateaubriand wrote, however, the memory of these outrages had been obliterated. The Jacobins had persecuted in their turn ; and their victims had often been harmless or even meritorious persons—prelates who were in sympathy with progress, and devoted parish priests who had done their humble duty according to their lights. Public worship had been suppressed ; churches had been desecrated and pillaged ; their ministers had been manacled and driven, with insults, to Fouquier-Tinville's judgment-seat. They could claim the sympathy due to the weak and helpless ; and the man who openly stood up for them might seem to have something of the chivalry of the sailor in the melodrama denouncing him who lays his hand upon a woman—"save in the way of kindness."

That turn of public opinion was in Chateaubriand's favour ; and there were other sentimental conditions which had prepared the way for his Gospel.

The interests of the Church had been bound up with the interests of the privileged classes. The aristocracy had toyed with unbelief in the spirit with which children play with fire ; and they had done more than burn their fingers. The fire had consumed their privileges and their property ; they themselves had survived as if by a miracle ; every one of them recalled the memory of some friend or relative who had perished in the flames. The thought of religion—of magnificent official religion—recalled happy memories of the days before their sufferings, trials, and losses. Their position was hardly that of contrite sinners seeking pardon at the throne of grace ; but



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they did turn to religion sentimentally, for old sake's sake, and in the spirit of tearful regret for the dear dead days beyond recall, and they were ready to accord an ovation to any man who helped them to indulge that vein of sentiment.

That was what Chateaubriand did ; that was the responsive chord in their bosoms which he touched. He gave them what they wanted. They wanted a sentimental system of religion suitable for worldly and fashionable people ; and he gave them that—gave it them, too, in rich French prose of novel splendour, as melodious as the psalms and canticles of their Church. That is the reason why the success of *Le Génie du Christianisme* was immense and instantaneous.

It met, of course, with a certain amount of hostile criticism. Madame de Staël was moved to laughter by the chapter "On Virginity in its Poetical Aspects." Benjamin Constant found in it "an equal lack of sensibility and good faith." Ginguené reflected even more severely on the author's sincerity. He told a story to the effect that Chateaubriand, on his return from exile, had called on him and confided to him that, as he had failed to make any impression by attacking Christianity, he proposed to make a second bid for fame by defending it. He also referred maliciously to the author's relations with Madame de Beaumont, declaring that it was incumbent upon those who preached the Gospel to keep a watchful eye upon "their own hearts and reins." There were a few other discordant voices ; but they were very few indeed, and were drowned in the clamorous applause of the faithful, and of Society.

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A letter written by Madame Hamelin<sup>1</sup> shows us how Society took Chateaubriand's part—

“At the beginning of this noisy century I saw a young Breton crusader carrying a torch by the mysterious light of which we read these charming words: *Atala, Amélie, René, Chateaubriand*.

“In Paris, that day, there was not a woman who slept. We snatched copies out of each other's hands; we stole them. And then, what an awakening! What a clatter of tongues! What palpitations of the heart! ‘What! Is that Christianity?’ we all exclaimed. ‘Why Christianity is perfectly delightful. Who is it who expounds it thus?’ ‘A gallant young soldier of the army of Condé,’ replied the beautiful Duchesse de Châtillon. . . . I stationed myself in the advance guard of the young enthusiasts; and, as soon as we met one of the wits of the Academy, we began to skirmish with him.”

And Chateaubriand himself tells us that he was overwhelmed by the attentions of “the crowd of Christian women”; that he was “buried beneath a heap of perfumed notes”; that admirers fought for his autograph; that invitations were showered upon him; that he accepted some of them; but that—

“Easy though it might have been for me to take advantage of some transitory fancy, my sincerity was revolted by the thought of arriving at the gratification

<sup>1</sup> A lady conspicuous in society under the Consulate and Empire, but not specially conspicuous for virtue. She had mysterious relations with the authorities, and was probably a police spy.

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of voluptuous desires by the chaste paths of religion. The idea of being loved for *Le Génie du Christianisme*, for what I had written on Extreme Unction, and on the Festival of the Dead! Never could I have been such a shameful hypocrite as that!"

Never?

But we have seen, and we shall see. Before the story of Madame de Beaumont is finished, the story of Madame de Custine has to be begun.







*Dolphine de Custine*

*Portrait by Louis-Martin de La Motte  
after a drawing by Madame de Custine*

## CHAPTER X

Delphine de Custine—Her adventures during the Reign of Terror—The beginning of her friendship with Chateaubriand—Chateaubriand's travels in the provinces—His visit to Delphine de Custine at Fervacques—His presentation to Napoleon—His appointment as Secretary of the Embassy at Rome—His correspondence with Delphine de Custine—His departure.

DELPHINE DE CUSTINE was thirty-three, a widow, and the most beautiful woman in France. Her eyes were deeply blue ; her pink and white complexion was still as fresh as in the careless days when the Chevalier de Boufflers<sup>1</sup> had called her "the Queen of Roses" ; her golden hair, of which Chateaubriand speaks again and again with dazzled admiration, shone round her head like a veritable aureole. She looks out on us from Campana's picture with a gaze half passionate, half melancholy.

Her young husband, the Marquis de Custine, had perished in the Terror. So had his father, the General de Custine, who failed at Mayence and Valenciennes, "accused," writes Carlyle, "of many things ; found guilty, we may say, of one thing : unsuccessfulness." Her presence in court, where she was privileged to sit on a low stool at his feet throughout his trial, came

<sup>1</sup> Son of the Marquis de Boufflers, brought up at the Court of Lunéville, chiefly famous as a wit, but also a successful Governor of Senegal.

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near to melting the hearts of his judges ; and we read in the *Bulletin National* that Hébert had to appeal to them not to allow her tears or her beauty to influence their judgment. They did not ; and she was herself threatened with violence by an angry mob as she descended the steps of the Palace of Justice. “C’est la Custine ! C’est la fille du traître,” they yelled at her ; but she faced them without flinching, and they let her pass unmolested.

A little later she herself was arrested on the vague but common charge of “intending to emigrate” ; and, as she had before been saved by her courage, so now she was saved by her beauty.

She amused herself by caricaturing the members of the commission sent to interrogate her ; and one of them—a master baker named Gérôme—was dazzled by the splendour of her presence, and fell, humbly and respectfully, in love with her. She should not perish, he vowed, if he could help it, and perhaps, if he were cunning, he might save her.

His official position gave him free access to Fouquier-Tinville’s office ; and he knew the dispatch box in which the public prosecutor kept, each on a separate slip of paper, the names and “dossiers” of all the prisoners awaiting trial. He knew too that it was Fouquier-Tinville’s habit to withdraw the “dossiers” from the box at random, in the order in which they happened to be lying, and that those prisoners whose “dossiers” happened to be at the bottom of the heap were nearly always safe for another day. For six months, therefore, with a devotion which never relaxed, he made it the business of his life to keep Madame de Custine’s “dossier” out of

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reach. Night after night, never once missing a night, he stole into the office, searched for it, and, having found it, hid it underneath the others, so that Fouquier-Tinville never saw it until, at the end of the six months, the counter-revolution delivered his *protégée* from peril.

That was in 1794, when Chateaubriand was teaching French and wooing Charlotte Ives at Bungay. After her release, Madame de Custine gradually, to some extent, recovered, if not her happiness, at least her fortune. She had powerful friends—Fouché was one of them—and their influence enabled her to get back some of her property. She travelled in Switzerland, where she visited Madame de Staël at Coppet, and met Lavater, the physiognomist, who threw up his hands in astonished admiration. “Your daughter is transparent!” he exclaimed to Madame de Sabran. “One can look through her skull into her brain. Never have I seen a face so candid.” Then she returned to France, and bought a place at Fervacques in Calvados ; and presently she met Chateaubriand.

Exactly how and when she met him is not known. Apparently she wrote him one of those “perfumed notes” which, as we have read, were showered upon him when he woke up and found himself famous. A letter of his to Fontanes, preserved in the Geneva Public Library, and published by Abbé Pailhés,<sup>1</sup> speaks of a communication which has reached him “with the seal broken,” and which he hopes that F—— (presumably Fouché) has not read. “I do not know what to do,” he adds, “to prevent such indiscreet favours from reaching me by the high-road of the post.” This

<sup>1</sup> In *Chateaubriand, sa Femme et ses Amis*.



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may, as Abbé Pailhès thinks, have been the beginning of an acquaintance which Madame de Custine's biographer, M. Bardoux, dates six months later; but rigorous proof is wanting, and the *Mémoires* do not help us. This is what we read in them—

“Among the bees who were then restoring their hive was included the Marquise de Custine, inheritress of the long tresses of Marguerite de Provence, wife of Saint Louis, whose blood ran in her veins. I was with her when she took possession of Fervacques, and I had there the honour of sleeping in the bed of the Béarnais, just as at Combourg I had slept in the bed of Queen Christine. Our journey was a great business. We had to embark in our carriage Madame de Custine's child, Astolphe, his tutor, M. Berstoecher, an old Alsatian nurse who spoke no word of any language but German, Jenny the maid, and Trim, a famous dog who ate the provisions which we had taken for our own sustenance by the way. One would have said that this colony was about to settle at Fervacques for ever; and yet the furnishing of the house was hardly finished when the signal was given to depart.

“I was to see her again—this woman who had faced the peril of the scaffold with so sublime a courage. I was to see her again—paler than the fates, attired in black, her figure wasted by impending death, her head wearing no ornament but her silken tresses. She smiled on me with her pale lips and her beautiful teeth as she left Sécherons, near Geneva, to die at Bex, at the entrance of the Valais. I heard her hearse driven by night through the solitary streets

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of Lausanne to its everlasting resting-place at Fer-vacques. She was hastening to hide herself in the plot of earth the possession of which, as of her life, she had enjoyed for an instant only."

That is all, and it is little, as M. Bardoux remarks, seeing that Madame de Custine loved Chateaubriand for twenty years. But that is Chateaubriand's way. He never confessed his loves with the precision of Rousseau; and one would not wish him to. The grand style is better than the shameless style, even though it leaves the biographer to seek the truth elsewhere. It does so in this case; but the truth—the full truth—is supplied by a bundle of old love letters, though we must go back a little before we come to them.

Ostensibly, on the return from Savigny, the life of the little group of friends was resumed on the same footing as before. They assembled, as of old, in Pauline de Beaumont's salon, and called each other by playful and familiar names. Joubert was "the stag," Fontanes "the wild boar," Chateaubriand "the cat," or, in allusion to his travels, "the great raven of the Cordilleras," Madame de Beaumont herself "the swallow." They continued, in their letters, to refer to each other by these "sobriquets"; and one would have supposed unless one knew—for no word in the *Mémoires* hints the contrary—that the old friendships persisted with the old intensity, and that Pauline was still, for Chateaubriand, the one woman in the world.

"I had promised myself," he writes, alluding to the Savigny honeymoon, "to begin it all over again.

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But," he adds, "the hands of the clock never go back to the hour at which one would like to set them." And that means many things.

What he intends us to take it to mean is that greatness was now thrust upon him—that he had become a public character, peremptorily called upon to serve his country on the staff of the French Embassy at Rome—that he sacrificed his inclinations to his duty—that he would not even have made that sacrifice, had he not hoped that Madame de Beaumont would follow or accompany him to Rome, and there seek health, under his care, in a warmer climate. But all that, alas! is an afterthought. The real meaning of the passage, read between the lines in the light of our other knowledge, is somewhat different.

It means that Chateaubriand was yielding to the temptations of glory, and that the vapour of the incense was mounting to his head. It means that, now that La Harpe had told him that his work "inaugurated a new age," he was living for flattery and was cherishing high ambitions. It means that he was, as he says, "making many new acquaintances," and that the "perfumed notes" already spoken of were very far from causing him displeasure. It means, finally, that the love of Pauline de Beaumont no longer sufficed for him. Already, before the visit to Fervacques, he was tiring of her, and neglecting her. The proofs of that are in their letters to Chênédollé, in whom they both confided, and also in Chateaubriand's travels—not only the journey to the house in which he slept in the bed of the Béarnais, but other progresses as well.

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The principal progress—the tone of the narrative compels the use of the high-sounding word—was undertaken, in the first instance, for the purpose of suppressing a pirated edition of *Le Génie* at Avignon. Migneret, of Paris, had sold, as a jubilant letter relates, “a thousand crowns’ worth of copies in a single day.” The “repeat order” of Dulau of London had been for 134 copies. But these sales would soon cease if a rival who paid no royalties were allowed to remain in the field. “If I am not to be ruined,” wrote Chateaubriand, “I must be off to Avignon at once.” He hurried there “secretly,” with a letter of introduction from Lucien Bonaparte to the Prefect, and achieved his object; but though Madame de Beaumont was pining for him he did not hurry back.

“I am perfectly astounded,” he wrote to Fontanes, “at the reception accorded to me wherever I arrive. My glory awakens echoes everywhere—in the newspapers, in the Clubs, in the Prefectures. My movements are chronicled as those of an important personage. If my book had been a treatise on philosophy, they would not even have known my name. But I have comforted unhappy souls. I have revived the principles which are dear to all hearts in the depths of the provinces. . . . People are grateful to me for what I have said, and for what I have left unsaid; and the worthy folk receive me as the champion of their own thoughts, their own ideas.”

Which means, again, that Chateaubriand, not content with a sip from the cup of homage, must drain the chalice to the dregs. What matter if Madame de



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Beaumont awaited him with sorrowful expectation, knowing that she had not long to live! He would return to her presently, but he must first make the tour of France, and show himself to all the religious people to whom his writings had been as balm poured upon a spiritual wound. So he proceeded upon his missionary journey, which was also a sentimental journey, and became a triumphal progress. He went to Vacluse, to Marseilles, to Nîmes, to Montpellier, to Narbonne, to Toulouse, to Bordeaux, to Blaye, to Rochefort, and to Nantes. Finally he went to Brittany to show himself to Madame de Chateaubriand; and he wrote to Chênédollé to say that Madame de Beaumont was on no account to be told what he was doing: "Give her to understand that I am still at Avignon, and that I am coming straight home to Paris."

Perhaps it was the kinder course thus to deceive her. Her health, as all her friends knew, was failing, and she must be spared all the emotional shocks—even the shock of hearing that her lover had been to see his wife. But she was wondering, wasting away, and grieving. "The country," she wrote to Chênédollé, from Madame Hocquart's country place at Luciennes, "is all dried up, and the society that I meet there only bores me. There is only one society that I care for now! The poor Swallow is living in a state of melancholy torpor."

Then came the news—it cannot have failed to come to her—of her lover's journey with Madame de Custine to Fervacques; and then she heard that Madame de Chateaubriand was coming to Paris; and then she learnt that Chateaubriand was going to Rome. Thus

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he and she were drifting apart, and hope was dying in her breast.

The *Mémoires*, of course, tell quite a different story.

Chateaubriand had been presented to Napoleon at a reception at the Ministry of the Interior. The rest of the company had stood round them in a circle while they conversed of Christianity. The First Consul had "seen at a glance where and how I could be useful to him," for he was "a marvellous judge of men." He offered Chateaubriand, therefore, the post of Secretary to the newly-constituted Embassy at Rome; the Ambassador being his own maternal uncle, Cardinal Fesch. Abbé Emery "conjured" him to accept the office "in the name of the clergy and for the good of religion," adding, as a further inducement, that Cardinal Fesch was "a mediocrity," so that the Secretary would be to all intents and purposes Ambassador. The Abbé's insistence, Chateaubriand tells us, overcame him, and he continues—

"I accepted the post which he was instructed to offer me without feeling in the least convinced of my fitness for it, for I am no good when I have to play second fiddle. Perhaps even so I should have declined if the thought of Madame de Beaumont had not put an end to my scruples. M. de Montmorin's daughter was dying. It was thought that the climate of Italy might suit her. If I were to go to Rome, she too might be persuaded to cross the Alps. So I sacrificed myself to the hope of saving her. Madame de Chateaubriand made her preparations to join me.

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M. Joubert spoke of accompanying her, and Madame de Beaumont set out for Mont-Dore, meaning to complete her cure on the banks of the Tiber."

That is his story ; and reference to our bundle of letters shows that it is another tissue of falsehoods, with no word of truth in it beyond the bald fact that Chateaubriand did go, as Secretary of the Embassy, to Rome.

It is probably untrue that he ever had any thought of declining the distinction ; for, in the correspondence with Fontanes, we read of "great projects" being entertained, and the allusion is almost certainly to this particular appointment. It is clearly untrue that he thought of taking Madame de Chateaubriand with him ; for, upon that point, one of the letters to Fontanes is explicit. "Observe," he writes to him, "to what a pass my domestic chagrins have brought me. The fear of having to rejoin my wife has, for the second time, driven me out of the country." And as for the suggestion that Madame de Beaumont was then uppermost in his thoughts, that point is set at rest by another letter of a still more intimate kind. "The thought of leaving you is killing me," Chateaubriand wrote—not to Madame de Beaumont, but to Madame de Custine. And more : it is actually to Madame de Custine, and not to Madame de Beaumont, that we find him writing : "Promise me that you will come to Rome !"

Several of his letters to her, written between the dates of his nomination to the Secretaryship and his departure, have been preserved. They are brief notes ; but the writer of them is in love, if ever a

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man was. They tell no story—evidently there was none but the old, old story to tell—but one cannot pass them without quoting. For example—

“You cannot imagine how I have suffered since yesterday. They wanted me to start to-day, but I have, by special favour, obtained leave to postpone my departure until Wednesday. I assure you I am half mad, and I think I shall end by tendering my resignation. The thought of leaving you is killing me. The climax of my unhappiness is that I shall not see you before two o'clock this afternoon. So, in Heaven's name, don't leave Paris. Let me meet you just once more.”

“The only thing that I live for is the hope of seeing you again. For pity's sake send me a line—a single line—to help me to get through the day. All the rest of yesterday afternoon I roamed through the streets of Paris, not knowing whither I was going. Ah! promise me the chateau of Henri IV.<sup>1</sup> Promise me that you will come to Rome!

“Nothing is yet settled as to the date of my departure.”

“Yet another day that I must pass without a glimpse of you! You will pass the time quietly enough. You will go out sketching; you will caress Trim; you will forget that there are people in the world who love you. My cell is very melancholy . . . a room emptied of all its furniture, and already announcing my departure. A little while ago all

<sup>1</sup> Fervacques.



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that would have mattered nothing to me. But *a holy vision of beauty that came to me in my lodging* has made the thought of separation insupportable. Think, I beg you, of the chateau of Henri IV ; then I may be consoled. I shall be with you to-morrow at eleven."

"At midnight I received orders to attend at Saint-Cloud this morning ; and I was so happy in the hope of seeing you to-day. Can you see me and invite me to lunch at eleven to-morrow ? One thing, however, rejoices me ; the date of our departure seems to become every day more uncertain. Love me at least as well as you love M. B——"<sup>1</sup>

"I shall be with you to-morrow at eleven, but I am in a state of great anxiety, expecting a letter from the terrible Cardinal. What will be its contents ?

"Good-bye till to-morrow."

And so forth, with all the impatience, the repetitions, the playful affectations of jealousy that one remarks in the love letters of simpler and less-gifted men.

The curtain fell, for the time being, on the episode when Chateaubriand at last received, and obeyed, the long-awaited order to set out for Rome ; and we can see exactly what was his mood and what the state of his affections when he departed. He was very anxious to be near Madame de Custine ; but he was even more anxious to get away from his wife. The

<sup>1</sup> Her child's tutor, a M. Berstoecher.

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“cause of religion” did not weigh with him as he represents; nor did his tenderness for Pauline de Beaumont. That tenderness had been killed by a fresh fascination. Not until he saw that Pauline de Beaumont walked with faltering steps towards the valley of the shadow did it return and triumph.

## CHAPTER XI

Chateaubriand at Rome—The Pope's high opinion of him—His strained relations with Cardinal Fesch—Pauline de Beaumont's failing health—Her correspondence with Joubert—She joins Chateaubriand at Rome—Her last illness and death—The grief of Joubert—and of Chateaubriand.

MANY pages—one or two volumes even—have been written on the question whether Chateaubriand was a success or a failure as Secretary of Embassy at Rome. The one solid fact which emerges from the records is that there was incompatibility of temper, resulting in strained relations, between him and the Ambassador. The Ambassador's view was that the Secretary took too much upon himself. The Secretary's view is summed up in this short sentence in one of his letters to Fontanes: "The Ambassador is an ass."

It may or may not have been Chateaubriand's intention to outshine the Cardinal; in fact he did so. He arrived at Rome with a great reputation, whereas Cardinal Fesch arrived only with the reputation of a priest who had once been a superintendent of military stores. His apparent modesty seems at first to have imposed upon M. Cacault, the Secretary of Legation, to whose place he succeeded. "Citizen Chateaubriand," wrote Cacault to Talleyrand, "is not likely to make a fuss about his book, or to pose as a theologian." But Cacault, unless, indeed, he wrote this ironically, did

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not know his man. Chateaubriand was "the man of his book," and was accepted in that character by Roman society, and by the Pope himself. His letters are emphatic on the point.

He is, he tells Fontanes, "master of Rome, spoiled, lionized, caressed." All that he needs is ready money, and perhaps he can borrow some from "our protectress."<sup>1</sup> His book is "in everybody's hands." The Roman Cardinals regard it as "a masterpiece of orthodoxy." The Pope has received him "as his son," distinguished him at the audience by stepping forward to greet him, made him take a seat by his side, said "the most kind and flattering things" about *Le Génie du Christianisme*, going so far as to "point out the page which he was then engaged in reading." What a holy pontiff, therefore! And what a respectable prince! So he expresses himself to Madame Bacciochi. And, of course, the lead of the Pontiff was followed by the ladies, with results that are described by Cardinal Fesch's biographer—

"The Ambassador soon got tired of seeing this universal consideration accorded to a subordinate. He felt himself eclipsed by the glory of his Secretary; and one day he went so far as to let fall an expression which showed bad temper. An Austrian Archduchess, the Emperor's sister, Princess Marianne, praised M. de Chateaubriand to him with exuberant enthusiasm. 'Yes, M. de Chateaubriand knows his business quite well enough to sign passports,' was the prelate's rejoinder."

<sup>1</sup> Madame Bacciochi.



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The whole story of the quarrel is practically summed up in that anecdote, though it was also conducted in the grand style, and carried on in dispatches. The Cardinal formally complained that Chateaubriand had infringed diplomatic etiquette, that he regarded himself as the reorganizer of religion in France, that he inaugurated religious negotiations on his own responsibility, and that he interviewed the Pope without informing the Ambassador. Napoleon sent for Fontanes and thundered at him on the subject. "If your *protégé* is not careful," he said, "I shall have him fetched home in a cart with his hands and feet tied together." Fontanes wrote to Chateaubriand imploring him to be careful and not to picture himself as the centre of the universe because of his literary reputation. Chateaubriand replied speaking of the Ambassador as "this man," and protesting that, if he were not promoted to an independent position in the diplomatic service, he would quit it: "I am not, like most men of letters, a bad man of business. All the matters of business entrusted to me have turned out well."

So the battle raged, and presently Napoleon relented. He reflected, no doubt, that there were several fools in his family, and that Cardinal Fesch was one of them. Probably he was influenced by Lucien and Madame Bacciochi, as well as by Fontanes. At all events, he put Chateaubriand's name on the list of those who were to receive preferment; and it was to receive preferment, and not to be dismissed or censured, that Chateaubriand was, in due course, summoned back to Paris. And that though he had managed to quarrel even with the priests by

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insisting that a child to whom he stood as godfather should be christened "Atala"—which is not, of course, the name of a Christian saint though of a heroine who, he said, was "quite as good as a saint"!

All these events, however, belong only to the outward life of the public man proceeding in pomp along the path of political distinction. His sentimental life meant more to him—or at all events seemed to have done so when he looked back at it and wrote of it. The time of his solicitation of diplomatic preferment, and of his bickerings with Cardinal Fesch, was also the time of the return of his devotion to Madame de Beaumont.

It has been denied, indeed, that his devotion ever did return to her. Madame de Boigne denies it with characteristic cynicism. "Although wearied by her presence," she writes, "he permitted Madame de Beaumont to follow him to Rome, where he abandoned her, and she died in almost complete isolation." But Madame de Boigne was a spiteful gossip who disliked Chateaubriand. Her testimony is not to be trusted. There is only a grain of truth in what she says.

Weary of Madame de Beaumont, in one sense, Chateaubriand indubitably was. That deduction from his letters to Madame de Custine is not to be resisted. He was writing to her, however, with punctual regularity. He described the Pope to her—"pale and melancholy, with all the tribulations of the Church upon his brow"; he besought her to intercede for him, and save him from the consequences of a "gaffe" which he had committed in calling on a potentate whom the French Republic had driven from his

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dominions. And then the news reached him that her illness was reaching its last stage ; and he was seized with the pity which is akin to love and can simulate it. He deceived her with his pity, and—almost—deceived himself. He not only “allowed her to follow” ; he even, as we know from one of his sister’s letters, entreated her to come.

She had left Paris for a “cure” at Mont-Dore, sick at heart as well as sick in body. Her letters thence to Chateaubriand have not been published—perhaps they have not been preserved ; but those to Joubert and his wife are very pathetic to read. She is so ill, she says, that she can hardly drag herself about ; she is uncomfortably lodged ; her cough shakes her to pieces ; in the filthy bed of a filthy inn, the fleas devour her. The weather is now too hot and now too cold ; and the mountains throw long shadows which fill her soul with melancholy. She is so weak, too, that it is a painful effort to her to write a letter ; and when, for a day or two, her cough is easier, she is too feeble to be restored to hope. “I am coughing less,” she writes, “but I think that only means that I shall die without making a noise.”

That was at the time when Chateaubriand’s quarrel with Cardinal Fesch was at its height ; and Pauline de Beaumont assuredly was thinking far more of him than he was thinking of her. “Villeneuve and Rome,” she wrote to Joubert, “contain all that I care for in this world” ; while Chateaubriand, disenchanted by his experiences of diplomacy, was cherishing egoistic dreams of sentimental journeys which would take him far away from her. He would travel in Greece ; he would shut himself up in one of the monasteries of Mount

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Athos. He would return having "seen all that a man need care to see" and having "enjoyed all the literary success a man can hope for." Et cetera—there is no word of Pauline de Beaumont there. But then—one does not know exactly at what hour or in what circumstances—came the appeal to pity; and his heart responded; and the pity was akin to love.

He said, "Come!" and Pauline de Beaumont hastened to him, though both his friends and hers tried to dissuade her.

Fontanes objected on Chateaubriand's account. The journey, for him, was "a crowning act of folly" which would damage his pupil's prospects by giving calumny a handle. People would say—what would not people say? And no doubt he was right from his own point of view of sage worldly wisdom. Chateaubriand's biographer<sup>1</sup> is quite wrong in saying that Madame de Beaumont's "noble origin" and the respect in which her name was held rendered her proceedings "innocent in the eyes of all." People did talk, accusing Chateaubriand of an intention to divorce his wife for Pauline de Beaumont's sake—a shameful act in the eyes of all good Catholics—specially shameful, of course, on the part of a champion of Catholicism. But Chateaubriand let them talk. "Les misérables!" he retorted, and went his way in spite of them, still bidding the women who loved him come.

Joubert objected too—for other reasons. He had never heard, he said, that the climate of Rome was good for anybody; but, if we read between the lines of his letters, we discover a graver note and a more personal regret. He knew that, if Pauline de

<sup>1</sup> Villemain.



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Beaumont went to Rome, it would be to die, and that the letter in which he wished her God-speed might be the last letter of farewell. The fulness of the heart speaks in that letter, and reveals the writer's secret—

“The pleasure which I used to take in talking is over for me for ever. I have registered a vow of silence, and I shall pass the winter here. My inner life henceforth is a secret between myself and heaven. My soul will retain its old habits, but I have lost the delight which I used to find in them.

“Farewell, farewell, you who have caused me so much anguish—you to whom I owe so much.”

The truth was out. Joubert had been more than a friend—he had loved Pauline de Beaumont in the innocence of his heart, more passionately than he knew; and it cut him to the quick to think that she dragged herself painfully across Europe to die in the arms of the rival who, loving her less innocently, and also less loyally, had supplanted him. Doubtless he had felt that jealousy before—he cannot but have felt it at the time of the Savigny honeymoon—but he had stifled it in his breast. Perhaps—he was so much older than she was, and so much wiser, and so much more like a counsellor than a lover—Pauline de Beaumont had never known that he was jealous. Perhaps—we cannot tell. Now at last the cry was wrung from him, and she could not fail to understand. But her time was short, and she had to choose at once between “Villeneuve and Rome.” She did not hesitate, but hurried on to Rome.

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She arrived, very tired, on the 1st of October, at Milan, whence she wrote to Joubert. "The characters traced so feebly," he said in his answer, "spoke to me so eloquently of your weakness and exhaustion that the tears came to my eyes." Detained by official business, Chateaubriand could not meet her; but Bertin<sup>1</sup> of the *Débats* did so on his behalf, and took her to Florence, where they found him awaiting them. Her wasted appearance startled him. She was almost too weak to walk—almost too weak to stand—"she could do no more than smile." They let her rest for a few days, and then took her on to Rome—the carriage proceeding at a foot pace so that she might not be jolted—and there lodged her in a villa at the foot of the Pincio. She began to keep a diary, and wrote in it—

"For the last ten months I have not ceased to suffer; for the last six months I have endured all the symptoms of consumption—some of them in an aggravated degree. Nothing was lacking to me but the illusions of the consumptive; and perhaps I now have the illusions too."

She does not tell us what those illusions were. Chief among them, doubtless, was the illusion that Chateaubriand still loved her. She feared that it was an illusion, but she clung to it. And he helped her—he made believe. He made believe so earnestly that he deceived himself, nursing his pity until he could

<sup>1</sup> He was the founder of the *Débats*. Banished in 1801 on the vague charge of "royalist conspiracy," he was allowed to return to France and to resume the direction of the paper, then temporarily called *Journal de l'Empire*, in 1804.

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not distinguish it from love. The sight of her sufferings, it seems, thrust Madame de Custine, for the time being, out of his thoughts ; and he was not called upon to make believe for long. Pauline de Beaumont had only three more weeks to live.

At first she seemed to rally a little in the sunshine. She begged to be taken to see the cascade at Terni, but the effort was too great for her. "Ah, well, we must leave the water to fall," she said, with her sad smile, and they led her back to her carriage. At Rome, again, she found herself well enough to drive, a few times, in the sun at midday, and there was talk of moving her to Naples in the spring. Chateaubriand even spoke of resigning his appointment in order to be with her there. That, however, was only the final deceptive flicker of the failing flame. She left the house, for the last time, on an October day, to visit the Coliseum, and sat at the foot of a Christian altar in the midst of the weed-grown pagan ruins ; but then : "We must go home. I am shivering," she said ; and, after that, she never left her bed. Chateaubriand and Bertin watched by her side in turns. The story of her last days is told in two letters to her brother-in-law with a touching simplicity which we miss in the more ornate narrative of the *Mémoires*.

The day soon came when the doctor abandoned hope, and Chateaubriand had to break the news. He broke it, with tears in his eyes ; and she smiled to console him. "You are a baby," she said. "Surely you knew that it would come to this." And then : "Still, I didn't think that it would come so soon. I must say good-bye to you all. Send for Abbé de Bonnevie."

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They fetched the priest. He brought "the paraphernalia of death"; and she confessed to him. "Her troubles during the Revolution," she said, "had caused her to question the goodness of God, but she now acknowledged her errors, and threw herself on the Divine mercy, trusting that her sufferings in this world might be counted towards her expiation in the next." Then she called her lover, and asked him: "Well, are you pleased with me?" and then she received the last sacraments, and waited for the end, which came quickly.

A sudden pain seized her. "It is there, there," she cried, clasping her breast, and seeming delirious in her agony. Her lover bent over her and asked if she still knew him. She nodded her head feebly, and that was her last sign of life. Chateaubriand placed his hand upon her heart, and found that it was no longer beating. He called the doctor, who hurried to her, but she was beyond his help.

So she died happily, believing that the heart of her lover had come back to her; and who shall say that it had not?

"Chateaubriand," wrote Joubert, on hearing of the inevitable loss, so long expected, "doubtless mourns her as much as I do, but he will not miss her so much or for so long." It was true, and yet it was somewhat less than true.

Joubert, indeed, never ceased to mourn for his friend. "The mark which she has branded upon my life," he said, "will never be effaced, and I shall never have a thought with which her memory and my pain at having lost her will not be mingled;" and the words were no idle, sentimental boast. He begged her



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portrait from Madame de Vintimille, that he might live with it. Every year he consecrated the month of October, in which she had suffered so much, as a month of memories and sighs. As late as 1822, when he was sixty-eight, his letters show that he still kept up the practice.

But, if Joubert was thus faithful, Chateaubriand also was "faithful in his fashion," more faithful to Pauline de Beaumont, at any rate, than he ever was to any other woman.

He had forsaken her, during her life, for Madame de Custine; and he was to return to Madame de Custine after her death. Many other attachments were to succeed each other in his life—at no short intervals. But he was faithful in his fashion none the less.

That he built a monument in Rome to Pauline de Beaumont's memory is nothing. It is nothing that he spent money on it lavishly, and even ran into debt that he might do so. All that might have been ostentation—the professional ostentation of a man of sentiment. But the experience of the years—so rich for him in experiences of the kind—was to demonstrate that the sentiment was deeper and the memory more abiding than he had supposed.

In his age he reviewed his youth, as we all do, and, obtaining the true perspective, could distinguish which were the affections that had really mattered. That was Pauline de Beaumont's long-delayed hour of triumph in his heart. Other women—many other women—had been dazzled by his brilliancy or his fame. Other women—many other women—had attracted him in the ordinary way of gallantry. Sincerity, if not intensity, had been lacking

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there. But Pauline de Beaumont had loved him for himself when he was obscure and penniless ; she had never loved any one else ; she had taken a long journey, fainting by the way, doubtful of his fidelity, in order that he might be with her when she died. The recollection held his heart bound, as it were by cords, and in the end drew it back. Her love, though he had set too little store upon it when it was lavished upon him, was the love that mattered for him at the last ; and the tribute which he pays to her in the *Mémoires* is not paid to any of her rivals.

## CHAPTER XII

Cardinal Fesch's complaints of Chateaubriand's conduct—Fontanes and Madame Bacciochi speak for him—"A year without Madame de Beaumont"—Chateaubriand rejoins his wife—His reasons for doing so—His nomination as French Minister to the Valais—Preparations for departure—His resignation in consequence of the execution of the Duc d'Enghien—How Napoleon received it.

It was a question for a little while after Pauline de Beaumont's death whether Chateaubriand would accept preferment in the diplomatic service or quit it altogether. He was resolved, at any rate, not to remain in Rome. "No one could possibly be persecuted more shamefully than I have been," he wrote to Fontanes. In another letter we find the appeal: "Make haste and get me out of Rome, for I am dying here"; and there is also a complaint of "a frightful jaundice, the inevitable consequence of my troubles."

About the jaundice he was probably mistaken. His quick convalescence proves that his indisposition, whatever its nature, was not serious. We find him travelling, and apparently in sound health, a very few days after his statement that he is ill in bed. But he was sick at heart. He had passed through a crisis which had made havoc of his emotions; he was suffering acutely, though he was not to suffer long; and his public position was also, as we have seen, uncomfortable and insecure. It was in his mind—the

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impulse seems to have been genuine while it lasted—to throw up his career and retire into private life.

An opportunity presented itself. A Russian general sounded him as to his willingness to accept the post of tutor to a Russian Grand Duke. It was "a fine position," he admitted. He would be "provided for" for the remainder of his life. But he hesitated, when it came to the point, not liking the idea of "another eight years of exile"; and Fontanes discouraged the idea. He saw his way to confound the machinations of Cardinal Fesch, and advance his friend in the service of his own country by obtaining him the position of French Resident in the Republic of the Valais.

It was a chance whether he would be able to do so, for the Cardinal was a jealous, unscrupulous, and double-faced intriguer. He had changed his manner towards Chateaubriand, and was making himself agreeable. He had expressed sympathy with him in his sorrow, and was exhorting him to take as long a holiday as he liked. Joubert wrote to Chênédollé, from information received, that their common friend would leave Rome "with the friendship of the Cardinal and the esteem of all the world." But the Cardinal's dispatches and private letters to his nephew were couched in a different tone.

"Citizen First Consul" (he wrote), "permit me to tell you something about Chateaubriand. Dissatisfied at his failure to 'run' my Embassy for me, and perceiving that I was quite able to discharge my duties without anybody's assistance, he made up his mind to be avenged. He has laid himself out to corrupt



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the priests whom I brought to Rome, and has put it into their heads that it is my business to provide them with benefices at the Pope's expense. I have learnt that they are complaining bitterly in consequence of his insinuations. . . ."

And the Cardinal went on to say that Chateaubriand was "an ill-conditioned schemer," whom it would be well to watch, and to call him "the *protégé* and paid retainer of Madame de Beaumont."

It was vicious, but it was overdone. Fontanes prompted Madame Bacciochi to that effect, and Madame Bacciochi prompted Napoleon. Possibly Talleyrand also spoke a word in season; and very likely the First Consul was too conscious of his uncle's limitations to need much prompting. At all events, there was no longer any question of handcuffing Chateaubriand and bringing him home in a cart. He was to return, with honour, to high office; the First Consul understanding, as he says, that he was one of those men "who are of no use except in leading *rôles*."

Meanwhile he had begun "a year without Madame de Beaumont," whose memory he had celebrated in his famous "Letter to M. de Fontanes on the Roman Campagna": a resplendent piece of prose, indisputably the "source" of the most eloquent chapter of Madame de Staël's *Corinne*, and said by Sainte-Beuve to differ from the descriptive prose of Rousseau "as Olympus differs from Geneva."

Perhaps—the criticism has been passed—he makes too gaudy a show in it of the pageant of his bleeding heart; but that was Chateaubriand's habit. His whole life, as mirrored in his writings, appears as a pageant

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of that painful kind, and no doubt his heart was really bleeding when he wrote, though the wound was quickly to be staunched. It was by giving literary expression to his grief that he subdued it ; and having won the victory, he returned, not to Madame de Custine, but to Madame de Chateaubriand.

His motives for doing so were various ; but the passionate desire for his wife's society can hardly have been included in their number. He had married without "vocation," possessing, as he says, "none of the qualifications of a husband," and his writings show that the idea of marriage always remained repugnant to him. "Next to the misfortune of being born," he writes in the *Mémoires*, "I know no greater misfortune than that of becoming a parent." "To René," he says in *The Natchez*, "the very thought of marriage was detestable." One could cite such passages by the score.

He was married, however, whether he liked the idea of marriage or not ; and divorce was obviously impossible for the champion of the Catholic religion. Moreover, the conduct of Madame de Chateaubriand had been irreproachable ; and she had lost the fortune which might have made her independent of her husband ; and an obstacle had been removed by Madame de Beaumont's death ; and there were appearances, as well as the claims of duty and sentiment, to be considered. So, though two years had passed since Chateaubriand had seen his wife, and ten since he had lived with her, the question of their reunion was raised.

Apparently it had been mooted already, on the

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occasion of that flying visit to Brittany, which Chateaubriand besought Chênédollé on no account to mention to Madame de Beaumont. Apparently Madame de Chateaubriand was then more anxious to return to her husband than her husband was to receive her. That is a fair inference from the protest in the letter to Fontanes, already quoted, that "the fear of having to rejoin my wife has, for the second time, driven me out of the country." It also follows from the appeal to Madame de Custine: "Promise me that you will come to Rome." Chateaubriand can hardly have wanted Madame de Chateaubriand, Madame de Beaumont, and Madame de Custine all to be at Rome with him at once. But Madame de Chateaubriand knew nothing of that; and there had been no open breach. Chateaubriand had sent her a specially bound copy of *Le Génie du Christianisme*; and now, in the hour of his grief for Pauline de Beaumont, he was less indisposed than formerly to listen to Fontanes' advice.

"Your counsel" (he writes) "about a person who is allied to me is good. I have seen the value of it, and I have long been thinking of it. Madame de Beaumont herself, on her death-bed, gave me the same advice. Only I cannot, at this moment, make up my mind to take it, and I shall be obliged if you will say nothing more to me about it."

In that mood of hesitation, he returned to France, and visited Joubert at Villeneuve. Joubert took up the argument where Fontanes had left it, and prevailed.

What aphorisms the aphorist employed one does

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not know ; but one surmises that they bore chiefly on the advantage to rising young diplomatists of a scrupulous regard for appearances. Napoleon was beginning to like to have men about him who were respectable ; the ruler who gave Madame de Genlis a pension for no other reason than her alleged respectability, and ordered Talleyrand to regularize his relations with his mistress, might well be inclined to shake his head at Chateaubriand's separation from his wife. Joubert may have pointed that out. At all events, Chateaubriand wrote from Joubert's house, inviting Madame de Chateaubriand to join him, and she agreed to do so . . . and then, only a few weeks afterwards, occurred the incident which was to interrupt Chateaubriand's public career, and send him back, for another ten years, into private life.

His nomination as French Minister to the Republic of the Valais had been confirmed. The Sion Town Council had written to promise him a cordial welcome, and to assure him that his appointment was "specially gratifying to a religious population." He and Madame de Chateaubriand had completed their preparations and paid their farewell calls. Napoleon had accorded him a final audience ; and he had shed a final tear under the shadow of the cypress which Pauline de Beaumont had planted in the garden of her father's mansion : then, as he was walking home to his hotel in the Rue de Beaune, he heard the official announcement of the execution of the Duc d'Enghien.

"The news" (he writes) "fell upon me like a thunderclap. It altered my whole career, as it



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altered that of Napoleon himself. I returned to my apartment, and said to Madame de Chateaubriand: 'The Duc d'Enghien has just been shot,' and then sat down at a table and proceeded to write my resignation. Madame de Chateaubriand raised no objection . . . though she was well aware of the danger that I was facing. The trial of General Moreau and Georges Cadoudal was proceeding. The lion had tasted blood. It was not the moment to irritate him.

"At this instant entered M. Clausel de Coussergues, who had also heard the sentence, and found me with my pen in my hand. He induced me, out of regard for Madame de Chateaubriand, to suppress my more passionate expressions; and then my letter was dispatched."

The letter is preserved in the Archives of the French Foreign Office, and the text of it is a little disappointing. It does not, as might have been expected, hurl indignant defiance at a Government guilty of judicial murder. It merely states, untruly, that Madame de Chateaubriand is dangerously ill, and that the Minister begs, on that account, to be excused from proceeding to Switzerland.

Perhaps it was because they had not seen the letter that Chateaubriand's friends were filled with apprehension on his behalf—that Madame Bacciochi "screamed" and that Fontanes "nearly went mad with terror." On the other hand, the risk may have been real seeing that Napoleon could easily have ascertained, if he did not already know, that the pretext was false, and that Madame de Chateaubriand was in the best of health. But nothing happened.

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Talleyrand considerately held the letter back until the Emperor was in an amiable mood. Then he glanced his eye over it, said "Very well!" and let the matter slide.

So, the sacrifice having been made, the crisis passed, and Chateaubriand returned to literary and domestic life—to the society of Madame de Chateaubriand—and also of Madame de Custine.

## CHAPTER XIII

Domestic life in Paris—Madame de Chateaubriand's grievances—Visit to Joubert at Villeneuve—Lucile de Chateaubriand—Story of Chênédollé's love for her—Her insanity and death—Subsequent career of Chênédollé—Chateaubriand's travels—Visits to Coppet and to the Grande Chartreuse.

LEAVING his modest hotel in the Rue de Beaune, Chateaubriand hired a modest house in the Rue de Miromesnil. "Deprived," he writes, "of my Alpine mission and of my Roman friendships, I did not know into what channel to turn my imagination and my sentiments."

The letters of his most intimate friends suggest that his imagination and sentiment flowed towards Madame de Chateaubriand. We find Joubert writing to Chênédollé that he seems "quite satisfied," and Molé writing to Joubert that he and his wife are "very loving"; but their testimony is not above suspicion. The reconciliation was their work; and they were in a hurry to assure themselves of the success of the experiment. The verdict of observers who were only acquaintances is more critical, and no doubt more trustworthy. Madame de Boigne, for example, declares that Madame de Chateaubriand's "middle-class pride was wounded by the literary reputation of M. de Chateaubriand, which she considered derogatory"; and she adds—

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“Madame de Chateaubriand had plenty of talent, but used it to extract the bitter and disagreeable elements from every object. She did her husband much harm by continually irritating him and making his home unbearable, and, though he was always most considerate towards her, he could never secure domestic peace.”

That is one point of view. M. Lenormant, in his work on Madame Récamier, presents another, writing of Madame de Chateaubriand as “the victim, faithful notwithstanding, of a hopeless egoism and a perpetual inconstancy.”

Unquestionably she was all that, and apparently she knew it. The inference could be drawn, if there were no other proof, alike from her own letters and from her husband's. We find her, within a very few weeks of the reunion, appealing to M. Clausel de Coussergues to call and receive her confidences. “Come early,” she writes. “M. de Chateaubriand will be out. I shall be able to tell you of ten thousand troubles that are tormenting me.” In another letter she invites the same gentleman to dinner, beseeching him of his “charity” to relieve her “loneliness,” and proposing that, after dinner, he shall take her to a café and offer her ices. Chateaubriand himself, in a letter of approximately the same date, aspires for “a few hours of liberty,” and describes himself as “a poor bird kept prisoner in a cage.”

Nothing is more evident than that all cannot have been for the best in the best of all possible households, at the time when these letters were written. Infidelity, it is not less evident, must have followed very hard



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upon the heels of reconciliation. We know, in fact, that it did. Madame de Custine—but we will come to Madame de Custine presently. In the meantime we have to note that appearances were kept up, and that Madame de Chateaubriand, whatever she knew or suspected, presented a smiling face to the world—always excepting M. Clausel de Coussergues, who was discreet. She and her husband had not rejoined each other for the purpose of making a public spectacle of their disagreements, and were at least agreed as to the desirability of deceiving their friend Joubert.

They visited Joubert at Villeneuve in the autumn of 1804, and made exactly the impression which both he and they desired. Their life is described by Joubert, in a letter to Molé, as “a spectacle,” “a subject for contemplation,” and “a model”; and Joubert’s youngest brother, who was also in the house at the time, bursts into exclamations of almost lyrical enthusiasm.

“He” (Chateaubriand) “had only recently been reunited to Madame de Chateaubriand, and he found her much more charming, much more intelligent, than he can possibly have expected. . . . A serious person who only knew M. de Chateaubriand by his works and who then saw the bard of *Atala* and the author of *Le Génie du Christianisme* unbending with perfect amiability and joining in frolicsome games of childish simplicity, would have been astonished at the spectacle; but he would have ended with the reflection: ‘Really this man of genius must be a thoroughly good fellow!’”

He was hardly that, if one is to apply the strictest

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standards ; but he kept up appearances successfully, with Madame de Chateaubriand's help ; and no doubt this keeping up of appearances helped towards eventual harmony. Meanwhile, it is true, he was living his secret life ; but he seems to have kept it as secret as he could. Possibly, indeed, he did not attach a vast amount of importance to it—for it was said of him by a shrewd observer that, in his love affairs, he did not “ give ” but only “ lent ” himself ; and, in any case, the emotions derived from it were interrupted by the tragic news, which reached him at Villeneuve, of the death of his sister Lucile.

Lucile, as we know, was Chateaubriand's favourite sister—his fellow-dreamer at Combours in his melancholy youth. “ Describe it,” she had said to him when he told her of the strange delight he found in solitude ; and so it was at her bidding that he took his pen and tried to put on paper the thoughts that were stirring in his mind. It was she, too, who had contrived his marriage, though for that, no doubt, he was less grateful. During the Revolution she had married the Marquis de Caud, her senior by many years—probably for the sake of his protection rather than his love ; but she had now been a widow for many years. She had written a little—just enough to suggest, though not to prove, that she had the temperament of genius ; but she had also the characteristic melancholy of the Chateaubriands, without the physical vigour which enabled her brother to be René with impunity. Every one liked her, though every one must have seen that she hovered on the border line of insanity.

Even from the *Mémoires* one hardly gets to know

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her—except by sight. There emerges only a vague impression—perhaps intentionally vague—of a wild, untamed creature, self-centred, never speaking out, destined to spring surprises on those who thought they knew her best. Her history, so far as we know it, is merely that she came to Paris, and that Chênédollé fell in love with her, and sought her hand in marriage, and was rejected.

He has figured, so far, in these pages, merely as Chateaubriand's friend, and as one of the three "ravens"<sup>1</sup> of the Joubert circle. Perhaps one may describe him most exactly as a lesser and simpler Chateaubriand, without the great man's genius, but also without his pose—terribly in earnest in his gloom, but also terribly in earnest in his affections : an honest, serious, but subsidiary man, living in the shadow of his friends, imitating them, and making his interests subservient to theirs. He was the only man, for instance, whom Chateaubriand, who was not given to confidences, entrusted with the secret of his passion for Madame de Custine ; and he kept it, regarding himself as a henchman who must not presume to criticize.

The depth and sincerity of his feeling for Lucile is beyond all question ; and his passion was as pure as it was intense. "In the presence of that heavenly woman," he wrote in a reminiscence which Sainte-Beuve has published, "I felt no sensual desires. I was as pure as she was. It was happiness enough to see her, and to feel that I was near her—the sort of happiness that I might have felt by the side of an angel." Nor

<sup>1</sup> The others were Chateaubriand himself and Gueneau de Mussy.

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can we doubt that she, on her part, loved her lover, though she refused to marry him, but would only promise to remain unmarried for his sake. This promise, she writes to him, "has a charm for me because I regard it almost as a binding tie, and as a way of pledging myself to be yours."

Which means . . . ?

Well, in the case of any ordinary woman, it would, no doubt, be enigmatic language, implying, in so far as it implied anything, a wish to retain, and trifle with, a love that she could not reciprocate; but another passage in the same letter shows that Lucile's meaning is very different from that. "If the thought is in your mind," she writes, "that we may some day be united, you must abandon it. I am not the woman to allow you to sacrifice your destiny to mine." And that protest, in the light of our knowledge of the facts, can carry one meaning only. It means—it can mean nothing else—that Lucile, a prey to illusions, realized her mental peril, and, foreseeing the long, dark shadows of the calamity that impended, was resolved that it should not involve her lover.

Of course, the lover protested and cried out. He pleaded for interviews, which were granted; he appealed for "a line in your handwriting to tell me that you still love me," and he did not appeal in vain. But the shadows were lengthening and darkening, though he did not know. The proof was in the letters which Lucile wrote him, though he did not recognize it, and took quite seriously her insistence upon secrecy and her complaint that her footsteps were being dogged by spies. He heard from Chateaubriand that she was very ill, but did not guess the nature of



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illness; and the time came when even he himself became an object of suspicion to her. There exists a letter from her to her brother demanding "protection from any fresh impertinence on the part of M. de Chênédollé." Some critics have seen in it a proof of inconstancy to her vows. In truth, it only proves that the madness which she dreaded had overtaken her at last.

In the autumn of 1804 she came to Paris. Chateaubriand took an apartment for her in the Rue Caumartin, "deceiving her," he writes, "as to the rent and the arrangements which I made with a restaurateur for her board." She soon left that address and went to live at a convent with the Dames de Saint-Michel. "My brother," she there wrote, "neither my letters nor my presence should weary you, for you will soon be delivered from my importunities for evermore. My life is shedding its last ray, like a lamp that has burnt itself out in the darkness of a long night, and can only last until the dawn in which it is to be extinguished."

A mad letter if ever there was one—as mad throughout as in the passage quoted; and it brought Chateaubriand hurrying to the convent to inquire what was the matter. Nothing was the matter—nothing or everything, as one likes to put it. A mood had passed and been forgotten, and there remained no grievance to be straightened out. The brother could only beseech the sister to be calm and to control herself; she, on her part, could only say that convent life did not suit her, and that she thought it would be better for her to live alone.

It was arranged that she should do so. Her

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maid was dismissed, and Chateaubriand placed her in the charge of his own confidential servant, the old Saint-Germain, formerly in the service of Pauline de Beaumont. Then he left her, joining Madame de Chateaubriand at Vichy, and proceeding with her to Villeneuve. No further letters passed—for what reason it is impossible to say—and for three months Chateaubriand was left without information as to his sister's movements. At the end of the three months came the servant's letter, telling him that Lucile was dead, adding that she had died friendless and solitary, and that he alone had followed her to the grave. Saint-Germain himself, however, by an unaccountable oversight, gave no address; and before Chateaubriand could find him, he too had died, so that all trace of Lucile was lost. She had been buried, without a memorial, in a pauper's nameless, undiscoverable grave.

Such, at all events, is Chateaubriand's story; and it is the vexed, embarrassed narrative of a man who seems conscious that his conduct needs excuses. He speaks of an "alarming illness" of Madame de Chateaubriand, which detained him at Villeneuve when he should have been in Paris pushing his inquiries; but Joubert's letters mention no such illness, so that the probability is strong that he is keeping something back. There may have been a quarrel, of which he does not choose to speak; or he may have feared to disinter some painful story of insanity culminating in self-destruction, and so have preferred to mourn without trying to probe the mystery. But speculation is as idle as the field for conjecture is wide. He mourned her, of course, and most sincerely; and so

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did Madame de Chateaubriand, though with the pious addition that death, in this case, was "a happy release"; but the real mourner, after all, was Chênédollé—the good, honest, simple-minded, devoted, inadequate Chênédollé. For three entire months, we read in one of the letters of one of the group of friends, Chênédollé went out into the fields with a spade, and worked from dawn till dusk, feeling that the fatigue induced by manual toil was his only means of subduing grief and achieving a little peace of mind.

In the end, of course, after a good many years, he lived his trouble down. Fontanes—that powerful patron of the little group of friends—made him first a Professor at Rouen, and then an Inspector of Schools at Caen, so that he was provided with an occupation suitable to his talents, and more or less congenial. He even persuaded himself—or was persuaded—that "it is not good for man to live alone lest he should eat his heart out and so kill himself or go mad"; the reflection appears in the midst of the notes which he consecrated to Lucile's memory. So he got married, and perhaps he loved his wife; but we may be quite sure that he did not love as he had loved Lucile—or as he might have loved her if he had never known Lucile. "Some things are impossible to some men;" and this was impossible to him.

Chateaubriand's grief, as always, was more of the nature of a pageant. Like a pageant it was splendid, and like a pageant it passed by. He wrote to a friend that the death of Lucile, like the death of Pauline, left him with the feeling that he was, once

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more, alone in a lonely world. He did not make the transparently false pretence that the society of Madame de Chateaubriand consoled him for his sorrows. But he kept up appearances, and took her with him on a sentimental journey to the Alps.

He visited Madame de Staël at Coppet, and found that she "regarded herself as the most miserable of women in an exile in which I should have been entranced." He went on to Chamonix, and was there inspired to write his famous depreciation of mountain scenery. Horrible in itself, he felt it had a certain consoling grandeur as the favourite resort of anchorites and other holy men whose presence exhaled sentimental sanctity in the midst of frozen deserts. He turned aside, on the way home, to make a pilgrimage to the Grande Chartreuse, where he apostrophized the monks of old: "Happy you who passed through the world without noise and did not even turn your heads to look at it as you passed!" And so forth, and so forth, Madame de Chateaubriand counting for nothing in it all, and the impression which disengages itself being that of a solitary man of genius trailing the pageant of his bleeding heart, while his wife trots after him like an intelligent little dog, indulgently permitted to follow at his heels.

And so back to Paris, and Madame de Custine, and the secret life, of which it is now time to speak.



## CHAPTER XIV

Chateaubriand and Delphine de Custine—Her refusal to lend him money—Their quarrel and reconciliation—Flying visits to Delphine de Custine at Fervacques—Extracts from Chateaubriand's letters—The subsidence of love in friendship and esteem—Chateaubriand projects a journey to the Holy Land.

IN order to consider Chateaubriand's relations with Madame de Custine, it becomes necessary to travel back a little.

"Promise me that you will come to Rome," we have seen him writing to her; and he really seems to have expected that she would join him there, travelling under Chênédollé's escort. We find him, at any rate, inviting Chênédollé, whom he proposed to employ as a secretary, and requesting him to bring with him an unnamed "person who is going to spend six weeks or a couple of months with me." But his other friends were, at the same time, trying to arrange to send Madame de Chateaubriand to him, and Pauline de Beaumont was also writing, on her own account, to say that she meant to come. Hence the appeal, already quoted, to Fontanes, "I rely upon your friendship to get me out of the mess."

The "mess," however, it must be added, was partly of a pecuniary character. Pauline de Beaumont alone had joined Chateaubriand, and he had charged himself with the expenses of her illness. The cost was heavy,

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and he was poor ; so he asked Delphine de Custine to lend him five thousand francs, and she refused. That was the situation when he returned to France after Pauline de Beaumont's death ; and one might have expected it to lead to immediate estrangement ; but it did not. We find this sorrowful confession in the *Mémoires*—

“ My grief, I fancy, flattered itself, in those distant days, that the tie which had just been broken was the last that I should ever form. And yet how short a time it was before I replaced, though I did not forget, the object of my affections ! Thus it is the lot of man to pass from one weakness to another ! ”

No names are mentioned, but the meaning of the passage does not admit of doubt. Chateaubriand, as we know, though he does not say so, had not waited for Pauline de Beaumont to die before replacing her. Her illness had brought him back to her, but her death set him free for the second time. It was not only about money that he had corresponded with Madame de Custine during his stay in Italy ; and now his return to her was simultaneous with his return to Madame de Chateaubriand. That confession also is contained in the *Mémoires*, in a passage which is in form a eulogy of Madame de Chateaubriand's merits.

“ Held back by an irrefragable tie I purchased, at first at the price of a little bitterness, the pleasant satisfactions which I enjoy to-day. Of the griefs of my existence only those which were irremediable remain. I owe, therefore, a tender debt of undying

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gratitude to my wife, whose attachment to me has been equally touching and sincere. She has made my life more serious, more noble, more honourable, by invariably inspiring me with respect, if not with the strength to be as faithful to her as I should have been."

Precisely—he could hardly have put it better. Joubert, regarding his life at this period from outside, wrote: "Our friend is the chief of a tribe which seems to me quite tolerably happy"; but that was the time when Madame de Chateaubriand was appealing, as we have seen, to M. Clausel de Coussergues to take pity on her loneliness and call when M. de Chateaubriand was out; and it was also the time when Chateaubriand complained—to Madame de Custine—that he was like a bird kept prisoner in a cage. He added that, in July, he would visit her at Fervacques, and that it would be "like a fairy story"; and she, on her part, without waiting to receive his visit, came to Paris, and took up her abode exactly opposite to his house—a circumstance to which Madame de Chateaubriand was very possibly referring when she expressed her desire to inform M. Clausel de Coussergues of the many annoyances that were "torturing" her.

A number of letters passed, though only those written by Chateaubriand himself have been preserved. It was his chivalrous practice to destroy love letters on the assumption that ladies did not like to be compromised; but he misjudged them. They were not afraid, but felt, as one supposes, that to be compromised by so great a man was to be flattered and distinguished; so they kept his letters, and bequeathed them to heirs,

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who sold them to dealers in autographs, from whom biographers in the fulness of time acquired them. Madame de Custine did so like the rest. There are about fifty of Chateaubriand's letters to her in the collections of MM. Agénor Bardoux and Chédieu de Robéthon; and the story, to which there is barely an allusion in the *Mémoires*, can easily be put together from them.

We find Chateaubriand, assuming the character of "a father of the Church, very unworthy no doubt, but still of perfect good faith," and in that capacity remonstrating with Madame de Custine for allowing her son to receive his first communion with insufficient preparation. We find him complaining again that "life is very sad," and that he is laid up with a fever and obliged to take quinine. We find him confiding to Madame de Custine that he has conceived the idea of a new book—*Les Martyrs*—and that the throes of composition make him unsociable and ill. We find him promising to stay with her, yet doubting whether he may not be prevented because "you know that I am not free." And presently we find him quarrelling with her.

She has been talking; she has told some one about Chateaubriand's request for a loan of five thousand francs. The talk has at last reached Chateaubriand's ears, and he remonstrates with some acrimony, and grows still more acrimonious when trivial excuses and explanations which explain nothing are offered to him. The refusal, he says, was bad enough in itself—"nothing was easier for you, in your position, to procure the small sum which I requested, and a score of my poorest friends would have obliged me by return of post if I



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had not given you the preference"; but the breach of confidence was an outrage. How cruel, too, to have been jealous of Madame de Beaumont! How cruel and how senseless! She should have been thought of, not as a rival, but as a woman who suffered, and needed help and pity. As for the malicious insinuations that Chateaubriand had borrowed money from *her* . . . et cetera. It was a good deal more than a storm in a tea-cup; and Delphine de Custine must have had very winning ways indeed to be able to calm it, and to persuade her lover that the breach of confidence was only an accidental indiscretion, grossly misrepresented.

She succeeded, however, and the quarrel was once more the renewal of love, with the faithful Chênédollé as confidant and go-between. That accommodating man was Madame de Custine's neighbour in Normandy; and visits to her could easily be represented as visits to him. So he was introduced, and made use of, and was trusted, and justified the trust, receiving and respecting Madame de Custine's confidences as well as Chateaubriand's, both at the time of the *liaison* and afterwards, when Chateaubriand was "behaving badly." No one but he knew that, at the time when Chateaubriand was keeping up appearances so successfully that Joubert found his domestic life a "subject of contemplation" and a "model," he was also paying furtive flying visits to Fervacques; and neither Joubert nor Madame de Chateaubriand seems ever to have extracted any information from him on that branch of the subject.

As for the history of those flying visits—we can trace it in the correspondence as a history of caprices

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and changing moods and lovers' quarrels, with coolness on one side at all events for its inevitable culmination. Sometimes Chateaubriand's language is as passionate and devoted as any mistress could desire. He addresses Madame de Custine as "dearest" and subscribes himself "yours, yours until the end of time." He writes, on the very day on which he quits her, to say that life without her "has already begun to be tedious"; and he expresses his dread that a letter addressed to him at Villeneuve may arrive during his absence and be opened by his wife. But there are other letters of which the tone is quite different—the cold and irritated tone of a man who considers that too much has been expected of him, and that women really are most unreasonable creatures, and that Delphine de Custine is the most unreasonable of them all.

Probably she was unreasonable, or at least exacting, after the style of a spoilt child. Her impetuous establishment of herself in lodgings opposite to Chateaubriand's house, under Madame de Chateaubriand's nose, was the act of a dare-devil and a madcap which warrants us in saying, as it would have warranted him in thinking, that she threw herself at his head; and, having little regard for appearances herself, she seems to have been hurt to find that he was not equally contemptuous of them. So we find him presently taking the line of a vain man who is very sure of himself, and remonstrating almost with acerbity—

"You persecute me too much. What can I do more than I have done? I have twice flown in the face of common-sense in coming to see you, and I

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have stayed with you as long as I could and longer than I ought. I assure you your most unjust complaints are making me very angry indeed. I really don't know what to do to please you. Do try and see how very unreasonable you are."

A quarrelsome letter that; and it would appear that the lovers not only quarrelled on paper, but also quarrelled when they met. On one occasion trouble arose because a letter in an unmistakable feminine handwriting was delivered for Chateaubriand at Fer-vacques, and his explanation that it was from "a Breton *sister* who wants tickets for the coronation" was received with scepticism, as very likely it deserved to be. Of another quarrel—perhaps about nothing in particular—there is a memorandum in Chênedollé's papers.

"One day," he writes, "they went for a drive, and Chateaubriand was cross with her. On their return she saw a gun which we had carried when shooting in the morning. She seized hold of it with a movement of delight and passion, and was within an ace of shooting herself through the heart."

We know nothing of the rights of that story, however, and very likely it has none. It has its significance, however, as a mark of a stage in the decline of Chateaubriand's devotion. A further stage indicated by the contents of the one letter from Madame de Custine to Chateaubriand which we possess—

"I have received your letter, and I leave you to

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imagine how it affected me. It was worthy of Fer-vacques and its public, but I took care not to read it aloud. I have the right to be surprised, I think, that your numerous specifications include no word about the grotto and the little boudoir with its two magnificent myrtles. You ought not to have forgotten all that so quickly. I, on my part, have forgotten nothing—not even that you do not care about long letters.

“Your friend is still here, but he is going tomorrow. I am more sorry than I can tell you, for it means that I shall no longer see anything that you have loved. There were passages in your letter which hurt me very much.”<sup>1</sup>

Here again we know nothing of the actual circumstances, but the letter need not, for that reason, be treated as an enigma. In the grotto and the boudoir, one conjectures, favours had been granted and intimacy had been engrossing; and Chateaubriand, in thanking his hostess for her hospitality, had seemed ungrateful and forgetful. Madame de Custine was discovering that, as the Duchesse de Duras, whom we shall meet presently, put it: “M. de Chateaubriand does not spoil his friends. I fear, on the contrary, that he is himself somewhat spoiled by their devotion. His replies to their letters are always irrelevant, and I am not sure that he reads them.” She had herself done more than any one else to spoil Chateaubriand,

<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Beuve and M. Bardoux print the letter as addressed to Chênedollé, but that must be a mistake. It must have been given to him as an autograph, or have found its way among his papers by accident.



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as, indeed, she recognized in after years ; and a pertinent anecdote about the happenings in her boudoir is reported by Sainte-Beuve. Even after disillusion had overtaken her, she still, it seemed, showed the shrine with pride in the spirit in which people in country houses show a room in which a king once slept. And so—

“ This,” she was wont to say, “ is the boudoir in which I used to receive him.”

“ Really. Then it was here that he went on his knees to you.”

“ Ah, but perhaps it was I who used to go on my knees to him.”

That is likely enough ; for she was also discovering that he was not “ exclusive in his affections.” She had discovered it before to her profit, and now she discovered it to her detriment. Her suspicion of the “ Breton sister ” who wanted tickets for the coronation may or may not have been well founded. It was not, at any rate, the only suspicion which she harboured. “ Another infidelity of mine, you see ! ” writes Chateaubriand in the style of a man who anticipates such a charge and answers it by making light of it ; but when he wrote that, the end of the intimacy was already very near at hand.

The journey to Switzerland had interrupted it ; and now a longer journey, to Jerusalem, and Carthage, and Spain, in quest of Oriental “ images ” for *Les Martyrs* was in contemplation. Chênédollé had been told of it, but had kept the secret, just as he had previously kept from Madame de Beaumont the secret of the flying

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visit to Madame de Chateaubriand in Brittany ; and when Madame de Custine at last found out, she did not even know that he had known. It is in a letter to Chênédollé that we read how she heard that a vague dream of travel had become a settled plan, and realized that the end of her happiness had come—

“The man of genius has been here for a fortnight, and he leaves me in two days’ time. It is no ordinary departure, and it is no ordinary journey that he is undertaking. This chimera of an expedition to Greece is realized at last. He starts to fulfil his vows—and to put an end to my hopes—accomplishing a task which he has long desired to essay. He assures me he will be back in November, but I don’t believe him. You know how sad last year was for me, and you can imagine how sad the coming year will be. He declares that he loves me better than ever ; but the proof is not very convincing—he is going away for a long journey in two days from now. . . .

“Good-bye. You can understand what an agony of mind I am in. I can write no more. . . .

“Everything has been delightful for a fortnight—but all is over.”

In a sense, indeed, Madame de Custine was wrong. There was to be no open breach. Chateaubriand was to remain her friend, and to write her many more letters, and to use his influence, albeit unsuccessfully, in support of her desire to see her son <sup>1</sup> made a peer of France. But it was quite true that she was no

<sup>1</sup> Astolphe de Custine.

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longer, and never again, to hold an exclusive place, or even the first place, in his heart ; and this very pilgrimage to the Orient was a part of a project of infidelity.

For Chateaubriand admits in the *Mémoires* that his famous *Itinéraire* tells only a portion of the truth, and that he did not by any means "visit the tomb of Christ in the spirit of a repentant sinner." On the contrary, he "counted the moments," and was "absorbed by a single thought," and "prayed to the winds to waft the ship more quickly," aspiring to "win glory in order to win love."

And the woman whose love he thus sought to win was not Delphine de Custine, but Natalie de Noailles-Mouchy, who had promised to meet him, at the end of his journey, in the Court of the Lions at the Alhambra.

## CHAPTER XV

Chateaubriand as a Catholic Childe Harold—Natalie de Noailles-Mouchy—Her early life and adventures—Her appointment to meet Chateaubriand in the Court of the Lions at the Alhambra—Chateaubriand's late arrival and Natalie's infidelity—The Duchesse de Duras—Later relations with Natalie de Noailles-Mouchy—Later relations with Delphine de Custine.

MADAME DE CHATEAUBRIAND travelled with her husband as far as Venice. It had been arranged that "worthy Ballanche"<sup>1</sup> of Lyons should meet her there and take her home. But "worthy Ballanche" was late for the appointment; and Madame de Chateaubriand, as she states in her Memoirs, "made a scene with him," and would not even grant him a day's grace in which to see the sights of Venice, but required him to start at once, at five o'clock in the morning. The incident seems to confirm Madame de Boigne's estimate of her disposition. Evidently she was "snappish," and one guesses that there was a fresh outburst of snappishness when a certain "dear countess"—not named, but possibly Madame de Custine—came to her in tears, saying that she feared M. de Chateaubriand must be dead, as she had not

<sup>1</sup> Ballanche was the son of a Lyons printer. He gave up printing in order to become a man of letters and to live in Paris near Madame Récamier. It was from his writings that Chateaubriand took the title of *Le Génie du Christianisme*. His contemporaries never refer to him otherwise than as "le bon Ballanche."



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heard from him for a fortnight. Madame de Chateaubriand herself, the *Memoirs* continue, received no letter from him for eleven months.

He was proceeding meanwhile to the East—to Athens and the Morea, to Constantinople and Asia Minor, and Palestine and Egypt and Numidia—in quest of “images” and “glory.” Those who wish to trace his footsteps must do so in the pages of the *Itinéraire*, which is a delightful book to read. Its topography is, in places, a little loose, and the alleged “observations” are often borrowed from the illustrious traveller’s predecessors in the field. Dr. Avramiotti exposed many of its inaccuracies in a malicious pamphlet,<sup>1</sup> and Titus Tobler,<sup>2</sup> the erudite German, speaks of the journey as “un voyage fait avec des Voyages.” But that hardly matters. One does not read the *Itinéraire* for information, but for sentiment, and “atmosphere,” and, above all, for gorgeous imagery and harmonious phrases.

Chateaubriand set forth as, in Sainte-Beuve’s words, “the first Childe Harold of the century”—only, of course, as a religious, and especially a Catholic Childe Harold. He belonged, as he put it himself, to the “class of the superstitious and the weak,” and he pictured himself as “very likely the last Frenchman to leave his country and travel in the Holy Land with the thoughts and feelings of one of the pilgrims of old.” If that was a pose, at least he posed for himself as well as for the world; and, as for the imagery and the phrases, he found them in abundance, and enriched French literature therewith—

<sup>1</sup> *Alcuni Cenni critici*, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Bibliographica geographica Palæstinae*.

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“The desert still seems dumb with terror, as if it had not dared break silence since the day when it heard the voice of the Eternal.”

In so far as the journey was a pilgrimage, that sentence may be said to strike the note. Chateaubriand was proud of it, and drew the attention of his friends to it in his letters, declaring it to be the finest sentence that he had ever written. Only, of course, as we have already seen, the journey was only in part a pilgrimage. Its true and ultimate goal was not the City of Jerusalem, but the Palace of the Alhambra. Chateaubriand confessed as much, as has been said, and we may as well have the full text of the confession before us—

“But have I told the whole truth in the *Itinéraire* about this journey which I began in the port of Othello and Desdemona? Was I really visiting the tomb of Christ in the spirit of a repentant sinner? The fact is that a single thought absorbed me, and that I was counting the hours with impatience. Standing at my vessel's prow, with my gaze fixed upon the evening star, I prayed that the winds might waft the barque faster, and that I might win glory in order that I might win love. I hoped to find glory at Sparta, at Zion, at Memphis, at Carthage, and to bring it to the Alhambra. How my heart fluttered as I approached the shores of Spain! I had passed through my trials, but would my memory have been cherished? By what misfortunes has not this mystery been attended! The light of the sun still shines on them. If ever I snatch a stolen moment of happiness,

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it is troubled by the recollection of those days of seduction, enchantment, and delirium."

The meaning of the passage—that Chateaubriand was to be met in Spain by the beautiful Natalie de Noailles-Mouchy—has been already indicated; but the *Mémoires* throw no light on the enigma, and the details have to be disengaged from many sources.

One source, of course, is *Le dernier Abencérage*; but that work, equally of course, is not a confession, but a romance. The story is invented, though the local colour is depicted faithfully. That reservation must be made before any critic says that Natalie is Blanca or that Chateaubriand is Aben-Hamet. Only the sentences describing Chateaubriand's impatience as the coasts of Spain drew in sight are transferred almost verbatim from the *Mémoires* to the novel; and there is apparently a touch of reminiscence in the passage which relates how the Abencérage wrote Blanca's name on the marble in the Hall of the Two Sisters—"in Arabic characters, in order to give future travellers yet another mystery to solve." Sainte-Beuve tells us of tourists who discovered Natalie's name there, though not in Arabic characters, but in Chateaubriand's own handwriting. There are later stories of Catholic tourists erasing the inscriptions, to suppress a scandal.

A further glimpse at the story—for a long time the only one available for biographers—may be found in the Memoirs of Baron Hyde de Neuville,<sup>1</sup> afterwards

<sup>1</sup> A royalist who tried to persuade Napoleon to recall the Bourbons. After the Restoration he held appointments in the diplomatic service, and was Minister of Marine under Martignac.

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Chateaubriand's intimate friend, and ultimately one of his literary executors. The Baron was in Spain at the time, and made Natalie's acquaintance while she was awaiting Chateaubriand's arrival. He tells us that Natalie, in love with Spain, and Spanish ways and customs, called herself Dolores, and delighted to execute the Spanish dances attributed to Blanca in the romance. He adds that he met Chateaubriand on her behalf when he disembarked at Cadiz, and was much impressed by the enthusiasm of his manner, reputed to be ordinarily cold, and disdainful, and stiff : "He was fresh from the Holy Land, and his enthusiasm had to find utterance, so that I was accorded the first-fruits of the *Itinéraire*." And then follows vague praise of Chateaubriand's genius, and of Natalie's virtue and charms. It is little, but Madame de Boigne tells us more, veiling her narrative under mysterious initials which can so easily be penetrated that they may be quite properly ignored.

Natalie was a Mademoiselle de Laborde; her husband, whom she married before the Revolution, was the Vicomte de Noailles. He emigrated, and went to England; she remained in Paris, and, in the later days of the Terror, was arrested and imprisoned. Thermidor delivered her, as it delivered so many personages who have figured in this story. She then went to London to join her husband, and found him aspiring to rival the Prince of Wales in the affections of Mrs. Fitzherbert. As was natural in the circumstances, he was not particularly pleased to see his wife. He proposed, therefore, making economy his pretext, that they should live together in



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a cottage in the north of England ; and, having settled her there, he found that business required him to leave her and go to London. A male friend in whom she confided remonstrated with M. de Noailles, warning him that unswerving fidelity was not to be expected under such conditions.

M. de Noailles replied that he neither expected unswerving fidelity nor desired it, and that, if his friend saw his way to seduce Madame de Noailles during his absence from home, he would be obliged to him. His friend took him at his word, and Madame de Noailles yielded to temptation ; but when the storm broke, as the conspirators had arranged that it should, the seducer made a full confession of the plot and of his share in it. Madame de Noailles burst into tears, quarrelled with him, and fled to Yarmouth. He followed her to Yarmouth, was forgiven, and returned to France with her ; but the *liaison* did not last. The beautiful Natalie was caught in the vortex of the Directoire orgies, and changed partners many times. "I am very unhappy," she is reported to have said, "for, as soon as I fall in love with one man, another appears who pleases me better ;" and this misfortune still pursued her, if Madame de Boigne is to be trusted, even after she had met Chateaubriand.

It is Madame de Boigne who tells us that their *rendez-vous* was at the Fountain of the Lions—just the romantic kind of appointment, in fact, that Chateaubriand would delight to make, and that Natalie would delight to keep ; but a cruel irony crowned the consummation of the plan. Chateaubriand was late—as much as two months late—for his engagement ; and Natalie was impatient ; and a French officer met her

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while her impatience was at its height, and paid his court to her, with the result that, as Madame de Boigne informs us: "When M. de Chateaubriand arrived, full of excuses for his delay, and of panegyrics upon the punctuality of his beloved, he found a woman in deepest mourning, bewailing with extreme despair the death of a rival who had been successful in his absence."

The ardour of Chateaubriand's affection, Madame de Boigne assures us, began from that time to cool; but though one would have expected it to do so, there is no convincing evidence that it did. He travelled for three months with Natalie in Spain, "combining"—it is still Madame de Boigne who speaks—"the functions of consoler and adorer"; and the intimacy was ostentatiously continued for some time after their return to France. Natalie, whose levities had provoked criticism even in that tolerant age, was socially rehabilitated by Chateaubriand's protection. He gave her a position more dignified than that of any of his previous mistresses by announcing that strangers could only make his acquaintance through her introduction; and the end of the *liaison* only came gradually after the lapse of a good many years.

Of the immediate causes of the breach, when it did occur, nothing is discoverable. Presumably nothing happened except that Chateaubriand, as usual, got tired of loving, and became, as was his way, neglectful; and the presumption is strong that he neglected her for a lady whose acquaintance he made through her introduction—the Duchesse de Duras.

Chateaubriand's relations with the Duchesse de Duras will have to be traced at greater length in a

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later chapter ; but the facts which bear upon his relations with Natalie may be noted here. She was Natalie's friend, and also Chateaubriand's confidante. She loved him, though she would not be his mistress ; and he loved her, though he could not overcome her valiant resolution. The tone of the correspondence proves that to demonstration. They address each other in their letters as "brother" and "sister" ; and we shall presently see the Duchesse de Duras helping Chateaubriand to set his finances in order and to launch himself on a political career. Meanwhile, knowing her own heart, she was afraid that Natalie might be jealous, and required Chateaubriand to reassure her on that point. We find him doing so, quite in the early days of their friendship—

"What madness is this, dear sister ! Madame de Mouchy knows very well that I love her, and that nothing can detach me from her. . . . Sure as she is of me, Madame de Mouchy forbids me neither to see you, nor to write to you, nor even to go to Ussé, whether in her company or alone. Did she do so, no doubt I should obey her, as I have told you a hundred times. So that is all right. You respect me for telling you this, and you will rely on me the more now that I have done so. . . . Believe me, I never break my word in any of the serious matters of life. If you would be my sister, I should be glad to be your brother. The elevation of your sentiments and the warmth of your affections prove to me that I should be a very happy brother, and that we should get on together admirably. It was Madame de Mouchy who inspired *The Abencérage* ; and I am glad that you like

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it so much. There is no sentiment in it that is not worthy of you.

“YOUR BROTHER.”

It is the letter, most obviously, of a man who is changing his allegiance in the act of denying that he does so ; and Madame de Duras' delicate apprehension that Natalie might be jealous can hardly have been unfounded. Natalie, undoubtedly, was jealous, and had grounds for jealousy ; and her jealousy preyed upon her mind ; so that her story had a tragic end of which we may read, partly in Madame de Boigne's pages, and partly in a letter written by the Duchesse de Duras to Madame Swetchine.

Her manner, we are told, presently became strange. She withdrew, for a long time, from society, as if to sulk and grieve. Then, at the Restoration, she plunged again into its gaieties, and was seen, says Madame de Boigne, “dancing at a great ball in rose-coloured finery” ; and at last, during the Hundred Days, her increasing eccentricities obliged her friends to place her under restraint. “Her wounded pride,” writes Madame de Duras, “had long been poisoning her life.” She did not, apparently, understand that she had herself done anything to poison it ; for Natalie had never reproached her, and she was very fond of Natalie, and she had only been Chateaubriand's “sister.” So she speaks of Natalie's “heart, ill at ease with itself, yet too proud to insist upon its rights,” and she goes on—

“In fact, my dear friend, all these causes have produced their inevitable effect. Her head has become



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bewildered, her imagination has received a shock, and she has lost her reason. I cannot tell you how it has grieved me. Yet my poor friend was glad to see me. There is no violence in her madness, but it is heart-rending. Terror has overtaken her. She believes that she is in danger of assassination, that all her food is poisoned, that we are all doomed to perish, sooner or later, as the victims of a conspiracy, but that the plot is specially aimed at her, and that all her servants are conspirators in disguise. In fact, she suffers from a thousand hallucinations. Every night, when she goes to bed, she fancies she will die before the morning—and yet she says that she is happy.”

And there follows a picture of Natalie in tears, demanding “what she has done that she should be treated thus,” and the prediction that “M. de Chateaubriand will be much distressed.”

No doubt he was, in spite of Madame de Boigne’s assertion that he heard the news “without a sigh.” No doubt, too, he saw himself once again as “the fatal man” whose love blighted and brought calamity, though whether he held himself in any way to blame for what had happened is another question. A case might be made out . . . but it would not be fair to press it. Natalie’s own conduct had been somewhat light ; one imagines her, with all her charm and beauty, a wild, irresponsible, inconsequential creature who would hardly have kept her sanity in any case. Chateaubriand had stopped to love her in passing, and had then passed on, as many men will and some men must—as he had done before and was to do again. Love, it would appear, was necessary ; but the

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women who loved him were not—until he met Madame Récamier—and even then——

But his heart, at any rate, did not go back from Natalie to Delphine, as it had gone back from Delphine to Pauline ; and as Delphine, like Pauline and Natalie, has no longer any essential part in the story, this is the place in which to say the little that needs to be said about her later years.

Allusion has already been made to Chateaubriand's unsuccessful attempt to secure her son's nomination as a peer of France. Some critics have attributed his failure to a lack of zeal, but they do him an injustice ; there was a far more shocking reason. Astolphe was a graceless youth whose vices were unnatural, and who was found out in them. He was not only found out, but punished—waylaid and beaten by the avengers of corrupted boyhood—stripped naked and left lying, in that ignominious condition, in a suburban field. Clearly there could be no question of a peerage for him after that. A family council was called to consider what should be done, and Chateaubriand assisted at it. Astolphe, he advised, must either fight duels right and left, or else leave France for ever ; but the advice was not taken. Astolphe fought no duels, and only left France for a little while, with the result that his career was cut short and he never recovered from his disgrace.

His mother's heart was broken, and her health failed. She withdrew from society, and lived in seclusion at Fervacques. From time to time she besought Chateaubriand to visit her. He wrote her charming letters—if he could be happy anywhere, he said, he could be happy at Fervacques—but there was

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always some reason why he could not come. First his duties as Foreign Minister, and then his activities as a journalist leading the constitutional Opposition were the excuses which he alleged ; and there may sometimes have been something in them, though they failed to satisfy Delphine. At last, in 1826, a wearied, withered woman, she went to Bex to die.

Chateaubriand, fallen from power, was staying at Lausanne at the time. Possibly, as M. Bardoux suggests, it was in order to be near him that she chose a health resort in the Canton of Vaud—drawn by the same motive that had drawn Pauline de Beaumont to Rome. But, if so, she came in vain ; for those were the days of Madame Récamier's ascendancy. She saw Chateaubriand once, and he pitied her, noting how pale and hollow were the cheeks of her who had once been the Queen of Roses ; but the pity did not turn to love. She died, not in his arms, but alone in the Hôtel de l'Union ; and his tears, when he heard the hearse rattle over the stones of Lausanne at midnight, were less for her than for his own long-dead, far-distant youth.

## CHAPTER XVI

Chateaubriand's return to France—His article in the *Mercure*—Napoleon's anger—The *Mercure* suppressed—Purchase of La Vallée-aux-Loups—The alleged persecution of Chateaubriand by Napoleon—The affair of the Decennial Prizes—Chateaubriand elected a member of the French Academy.

ACCORDING to M. Villemain, it was "not without remorse" that Chateaubriand took Natalie de Noailles to the picture galleries of the Escorial and reviewed Murillo's virgins; but it is more likely that he discovered the remorse, and spoke of it, afterwards, than that he experienced it at the time. He continued, for some while longer, a devout lover as well as a devout man, though the circle of his interests, and also of his anxieties, was widening. His pilgrimage had been an event of importance to France as well as to himself; and so was his return. He had challenged attention, and had won it. The eyes not only of his friends, but also of his countrymen and his Emperor, were upon him.

Enthusiasts went forth to meet him on his way home. "Several men of letters," Abbé Pailhès tells us, waylaid him at Bordeaux. They may almost be said to have "interviewed" him, for their record of their impressions, which Abbé Pailhès quotes, is quite on the lines of the tribute which the modern reporter pays to a celebrity. They speak of themselves as



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“prepossessed in his favour” by the “frank cordiality of his greeting”; they find the tone of his writings faithfully reflected in the expression of his countenance. He looks “grave, religious, and softly and sweetly passionate,” but “a tinge of melancholy overclouds his features.” Questioned as to his plans, he declares that he seeks only quiet and repose. “What I want,” he told us, “is a plot of land of my own, and shade to sit in.”

He was to buy a plot of land presently; but first he bought a newspaper—the *Mercure*—which Fontanes was willing to sell for twenty thousand francs; and almost the first article which he wrote for it—a review of M. de Laborde’s *Voyage pittoresque en Espagne*—got him into trouble with Napoleon.

The article, indeed, though in form a review, was in spirit a royalist manifesto. “It is vain,” Chateaubriand wrote, “that Nero prospers, for his Empire has already given birth to Tacitus;” and that, of course, was a way of saying that Napoleon was as iniquitous an Emperor as Nero, and would fare as badly with posterity. He added an allusion of similar import, and equally irrelevant to the subject nominally under discussion, to the revolt of Sertorius against Sulla; and he introduced a passing tribute to the memory of two exiled Bourbon princesses by whose graves he had wept in Italy.

It was a deliberate challenge, deliberately thrown down, and it produced the effect which might have been expected. “If Napoleon had got rid of the kings,” Chateaubriand writes, “he had not got rid of me;” and he proceeds—

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“No one who was not living at the time can form even the faintest idea of the effect produced by the voice that made itself heard alone in the midst of a silent world. The noble sentiments which had been crushed in men’s hearts awoke once more; and Napoleon flew into a passion. . . . What! Was even his glory an object of contempt? Did I brave for the second time the wrath of him at whose feet the universe lay prostrate? ‘Does Chateaubriand think I am a fool?’ he exclaimed. ‘Does he flatter himself that I can’t see the meaning of this? He shall be cut to pieces on the steps of the Tuileries.’”

And then, descending from rhetoric to fact—

“He ordered that the *Mercur*e should be suppressed, and that I should be arrested. My property perished, but my person escaped by a miracle. Bonaparte had the affairs of the world to think of, and he forgot me; but I remained crushed under the weight of his threat.”

According to Madame de Chateaubriand, it was the ever hostile Cardinal Fesch who showed Napoleon the article, though of course he could hardly have failed to see it in any case. She adds that it was because of the Cardinal’s indecent delight at Chateaubriand’s disgrace that the order for his arrest was cancelled. M. Villemain, on the other hand, says that it was withdrawn at the entreaty of Fontanes, who pointed out that, when all was said and done, Chateaubriand’s books were among the glories of the imperial *régime*. Napoleon himself, as we shall see

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presently, esteemed his writings highly when his own prestige was not impugned by them; and it is on the whole more probable that his clemency was determined by that motive than by a desire to annoy his uncle.

Be that as it may, however, Chateaubriand, provisionally in disgrace, was ordered out of Paris. He sulked, and talked of leaving France and settling in the United States; but Fontanes reasoned with him. The Americans, he said, were "an even more barbarous and commercial people than the English," and grossly indifferent to the arts. Chateaubriand would never be happy with them. He had better sit down quietly at home, and write his book, and be careful to put nothing in it that could offend the ruling powers: "No topical allusions when one writes for immortality. Otherwise you will have the story of the *Mercur* over again. Lions have sharp teeth and should not be irritated."

Probably that was the advice that Chateaubriand desired to receive. At all events he took it, bought La Vallée-aux-Loups—a dilapidated house with a garden of about fifteen acres, in the country, but yet within an easy drive of Paris—and settled down there to write *Les Martyrs*, entertain his friends, and read them extracts from his work as it progressed. "I enjoyed," he writes, "a never-ending series of enchantments;" and he enlarges on the pleasure which he took in planting trees, and in gardening. His enthusiasm was such that, M. de Latouche<sup>1</sup> tells us,

<sup>1</sup> The Latouche who afterwards gave George Sand her chance on the *Figaro*.

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he pursued his horticultural operations even in the worst December weather, wearing wooden shoes and protecting himself from the rain with an umbrella.

Abbé Pailhès assures us that he was happy, and that it was Madame de Chateaubriand who made him so; but the greater of these propositions does not necessarily include the less. Madame de Chateaubriand was nicknamed "the cat" because of her "feline amenities"; and these, though they delighted her friend Joubert, seem to have been less pleasing to her husband, who, according to Madame de Boigne, only tolerated her because she believed in his genius and his star, and professed to have discovered a prediction of his coming fame in the Book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine. That comforting feat of scriptural exegesis was, so far as one can make out, her sole contribution to his felicity; and he found various other ladies far more assiduously devoted. They sent him plants and saplings for his groves. They read his books, whereas Madame de Chateaubriand openly boasted that she did not read them. They invited him to their country houses and sat at his feet. One of them, as we shall see presently, lent him money when he needed it; so that it seems a fair inference that his happiness during these years—from 1807 to 1814—was far more due to them than to his wife.

He was thirty-nine at the beginning of the period, and forty-six at the end of it. It was the period in which his literary renown attained its culmination—the end of it being marked, as shall be noted later,



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by his first effective incursion into party politics. It was also the period of his long "duel," as he regarded it, with Napoleon.

Napoleon, Madame de Boigne assures us, classed Chateaubriand with the "idealists"; but she makes haste to add that "this was a mistake."

"M. de Chateaubriand," she says, "cared nothing about the human race; he was entirely occupied with his own personality, and with the task of creating a pedestal from which he could look down upon his age. This was a difficult place to assume side by side with Napoleon, but he worked incessantly, and his memoirs will show the world with what toil, with what perseverance, and with what hopes of success. He succeeded so far that he always made himself a little atmosphere of his own of which he was the sun. As soon as he left this environment the outer air affected him so painfully that he became unbearably morose. But while he was in his own atmosphere no one could be kinder or more amiable, or send forth his beams with more grace."

That, we may take it, is a representative view of critical contemporaries; but when we turn, as Madame de Boigne directs us, to the memoirs, we find Chateaubriand exaggerating, if not his own importance, at all events the bitterness of Napoleon's hostility towards him. He says, in a passage quoted, that Napoleon "forgot" him. He implies elsewhere that Napoleon hated and feared and persecuted him. The truth is that Napoleon sometimes lost his temper with him, but was, on the whole, as indulgent, and even as

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sympathetic, as Chateaubriand would allow him to be—an attitude widely different from that which he adopted towards Chateaubriand's illustrious contemporary, Madame de Staël.

Two principal instances of persecution are cited. Napoleon rejected Chateaubriand's petition for the pardon of his cousin, Armand de Chateaubriand, who had been arrested while conveying treasonable communications from the Bourbons abroad to the royalists in France ; and he gave orders to the newspapers to review *Les Martyrs* unfavourably. The latter act was certainly petty ; but in the former case considerations of policy were at stake, and it was hardly to be expected that the treatment meted out to a traitor would be solely determined by the wishes of the traitor's relatives. On other occasions the Emperor showed a genuine interest in Chateaubriand and a sincere desire that the achievements of his genius should receive the reward of merit.

There is the story, for instance, of his portrait by Girodet, which was exhibited in the Salon of 1808. Denon, the director, had been obliged to accept it on account of the painter's reputation, but, understanding that Chateaubriand was in bad odour at Court, he had hidden it in a cupboard, so that it might not attract Napoleon's attention. The Emperor, however, had heard of it, was curious to see it, and demanded that it should be shown to him. It was brought forth from its hiding-place, and he examined it with a smile. "Aha ! M. de Chateaubriand looks like a conspirator who has just come down the chimney," he commented blandly, as he continued his progress through the rooms.

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That incident, if it stood alone, might be held, of course, to indicate interest rather than sympathy; but there is open and avowed sympathy, and even the wish to do a good turn, in Napoleon's championship of Chateaubriand's title, first to receive a literary prize from the Academy,<sup>1</sup> and then to be elected to membership.

The so-called Decennial Prizes were established by a decree of September 10, 1804. There were to be nine first prizes, each of the value of ten thousand francs, and thirteen second prizes, each of the value of five thousand francs; and the first distribution was to take place on November 9, 1810. The Report of the Committee appointed to recommend candidates was drawn up by Marie-Joseph Chénier and presented to the Emperor early in 1808, on the eve of his departure for Bayonne to dethrone the King of Spain. Chateaubriand's name was not mentioned in it—naturally enough, seeing that the Academicians in possession were, for the most part, eighteenth-century men, enamoured of chaste prose and irreligious opinions, equally opposed to Christianity and to florid rhetoric.

Napoleon said nothing, but cancelled the decree and substituted a new one. There should be thirty-five prizes, he decided, instead of twenty-two, and one of them should be awarded to "the author of the literary work which combines in the highest degree novelty of ideas, talent in composition, and elegance of style." This necessitated the preparation of a new Report. It was prepared and delivered, but, like

<sup>1</sup> The Academy, nominally abolished, had been practically reconstituted as one of the sections of the Institut de France.

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the previous one, it ignored Chateaubriand's claims ; whereupon, though the announcement had already been made that the prizes would be distributed "by the very hand of him who is the source of all true glory," the Academicians received the following letter from the Minister of the Interior—

"His Majesty desires to know the reason why the Institute makes no mention, in its report on the decennial prizes, when speaking of the tenth or eleventh prize, of *Le Génie du Christianisme*, by M. de Chateaubriand—a work which has been much spoken of and is now in its seventh or eighth edition. I beg you, therefore, to convoke the Committee and invite it to explain the motives which determined its silence with regard to this book."

There, at last, was a deliberate challenge. The Academicians took it up, and responded to it as best they could. Some of them went further than others. One of them even went so far as to say that he regarded *Le Génie du Christianisme* as a "ridiculous" composition ; but the majority contented themselves with wrapping up in careful periphrases the diplomatic answer that they had not recommended the book because they had not thought it good enough to merit exceptional recognition. Its undeniable "beauties of detail," they urged, did not compensate for its lack of "form" and "philosophic basis." Napoleon respected their decision, but took his ironical revenge by promoting Chateaubriand's candidature for the vacancy in the Academy caused by Marie-Joseph Chénier's death in 1811.



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Chateaubriand, it is true, tells the story differently. He says, in the *Mémoires*, that he presented himself as a candidate at the solicitation of his "friends" and in the belief that membership of so respectable a body would protect him from "the hostility of the Chief of the State and the suspicions and annoyances of the police"; but his letters show that this was not the case. "The Duc de Rovigo," he wrote to M. Abel, in 1815, "ordered me to come forward as a candidate under pain of being locked up at Vincennes for the remainder of my days, if I failed to do so"; and, though that is a jocular way of putting things, and not to be taken literally, the truth clearly is that the Chief of the Police received orders from his master not only to press Chateaubriand to present himself, but also to see that he did not present himself in vain.

He did present himself, and was helped not only by the police, but by the ladies. Madame de Vintimille took him to call on Abbé Morellet, who had fallen asleep while reading the *Itinéraire*, and awoke with a start, exclaiming that it was "tedious, very tedious." Sophie Gay persuaded Népomucène Lemerrier<sup>1</sup>—the very Academician who had described *Le Génie du Christianisme* as "ridiculous"—to vote for him. Where he had no such introductions to the electors, and no previous acquaintance with them, he conducted his canvass with disdainful nonchalance, merely leaving his card instead of asking to be received. One of the electors is said, in consequence, to have cast his vote for "M. de Chateaubriand's horse," declaring that the horse and not the rider had

<sup>1</sup> The dramatist. His most famous work is *Le Tartufe révolutionnaire*.

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called on him ; but, in spite of his contemptuous proceedings, the influences in his favour prevailed, and he was elected. He tells us himself that he secured "a fairly strong majority"; but, according to the *Journal de l'Empire*, only twenty-five of the forty Academicians took part in the voting, and only thirteen of them voted for Chateaubriand.

Be that as it may, however, Chateaubriand was elected ; but, though elected, he was not "received." His proposed inaugural speech had to be submitted for censorship, and failed to give satisfaction. He was summoned to Saint-Cloud, where his manuscript was handed back to him with suggested alterations in the Emperor's own handwriting. He refused either to adopt them or to substitute a new speech for the old one, and when his colleagues pressed him on the point, he addressed the following letter to the President—

"MONSIEUR LE PRÉSIDENT,

"My occupations and my indifferent health preventing me from working, it is impossible for me, at the present moment, to fix a date at which it will be convenient to me to enjoy the honour of being received by the Academy.

"I am, with respect, etc.,

"DE CHATEAUBRIAND."

So the reception was postponed indefinitely, and did not take place until after the Empire had fallen. The discourse, however, created hardly less sensation than if it had actually been delivered. Copies were made of it, passed round, and read surreptitiously in

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drawing-rooms. Chateaubriand professes to believe that he was once more in danger and that fashionable women "interposed their beauty" and protected him. However that may be, he was certainly the idol of the hour in his own circle, exalted to a pinnacle of literary renown, and basking in the smiles and flattery of a court of women, some of whom, when he was poor—and he wrote of himself at this date as "penniless"—laid even their purses at his feet.

## CHAPTER XVII

Publication of *Les Martyrs*—The hostility of the Press—Eulogistic verses by Fontanes—Chateaubriand's literary position—René compared with Obermann—and with Adolphe—The court of women—Madame de Chateaubriand and the "Madames."

*LES MARTYRS*—Chateaubriand's highly-coloured picture of the clash of the Christian and pagan worlds—appeared in 1809 and, in spite of the gorgeous "images" of the Orient, fell flat. He attributed its failure, as lesser men have attributed the failure of lesser works, to the dead set made at it by the critics. The Emperor, he says, gave the word, and the reviewers fell upon him savagely.

Some of them certainly did so. One review was published under the title "Radotage"—an expression of which "Tommy-rot" seems a fairly adequate rendering; and Hoffmann, in the *Journal de l'Empire*, assailed the work with sprightly malice as "a bad book by a clever man." Not all the reviews, however, were hostile—Guizot, for one, praised it in the *Publiciste*—and not all the hostility was "inspired." Benjamin Constant, who was one of the recipients of presentation copies, had no reason to love, or to take his literary opinions from, Napoleon; but he complains, in his *Journal Intime* of the "sustained pomposity" of *Les Martyrs*, and sustained pomposity may be quite



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as grave an impediment to popular success as an unfavourable review.

"A few of my friends," Chateaubriand writes, "consoled me." Guizot was one who did so, and "the worthy Ballanche" was another. Ballanche, it is said, could not even mention the name of Chateaubriand's heroine without being moved to tears. Fontanes went further, and wrote a poem for his consolation, comparing him to Tasso seeking comfort at the tomb of Virgil—the famous lines beginning—

"Le Tasse, errant de ville en ville,  
Un jour, accablé de ses maux,  
S'assit pres du laurier fertile  
Qui sur la tombe de Virgile  
Etend toujours ses verts rameaux."

And containing the cheering stanzas —

"Chateaubriand, le sort du Tasse  
Doit t'instruire et te consoler ;  
Trop heureux qui, suivant sa trace,  
Au prix de la même disgrâce,  
Dans l'avenir peut l'égalar !

"Contre toi du peuple critique  
Que peut l'injuste opinion ?  
Tu retrouvas la Muse antique  
Sous la poussière poétique  
Et de Solime et d'Ilion."

The verses doubtless cheered the author in his despondency, the more so as Fontanes had always been his severest critic ; and he derived more substantial comfort from the success of the *Itinéraire*, published in 1811.

He attached, he tells us, far less importance to this work than to *Les Martyrs*. It certainly cost him far

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less trouble to write. But he also put far more of himself into it ; and, in Chateaubriand's work, it is always the personal note, not the profundity of the impersonal thought that counts. His readers—especially his feminine readers—admired him in the same spirit in which he admired Christianity. His invented narratives of early Christian heroes left them cold ; but they rejoiced in the romantic figure of the Man of Sentiment stalking through the Promised Land to a romantic *rendez-vous* at the Alhambra. If, therefore, the *Itinéraire* is, in one sense, the supplement and complement of *Le Génie du Christianisme*, it is also, in another sense, the supplement and complement of *René*—to which work, while the personal note and the fascination exercised by it is in question, it may be proper, for a moment, to go back.

It was an article of faith with contemporary readers—with the women among them, at all events—that René was Chateaubriand himself ; and it was an article of faith with Chateaubriand that René was unique. He takes that line even in the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*, in which, as has been said, he “recreates” René in his old age. There is a germ of truth in both dogmas ; but neither of them can be left unqualified.

René was Chateaubriand in one of his moods ; but Chateaubriand had more moods than one. If, like René, he had lost his illusions before he had really begun to live, he was unlike René in his readiness to renew them and give life a second, and even a third, chance. If he sometimes cherished René's passion for solitude, he also, at more frequent times cherished a passion unknown to René for society, for power, and

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for playing to the gallery in the limelight. It has been written of him that he "sometimes embraced his enemies, but always on the balcony." When one of his friends was told that he would be content to live in a garret, the answer was: "Yes, I have no doubt that M. de Chateaubriand would be satisfied to live in a garret—provided that the garret were on a stage."

That to begin with; and in the second place René was not unique. The type, as in all great works of art, was individualized; but he was typical none the less: typical of the melancholy and *malaise* that lurks in wait for the "intellectuals," who are also men of sentiment, at almost all periods of history; typical, in particular, of the melancholy and *malaise* which followed upon the supposed failure of the "so-called eighteenth century." He had had his predecessors in the Preacher, Lucretius, Virgil, Saint Augustine, Hamlet, Werther; he was to have his successor—his imitator and plagiarist, as he fancied—in Childe Harold; he had his contemporaries—victims of the same century as himself—in Adolphe and Obermann.

We need not stop to criticize the century, or consider whether it has been maligned. It was a very miscellaneous century, seeing that it produced Kant as well as Hume, and Chateaubriand as well as Voltaire. But there certainly was something in it—whether its early intellectual aridity or its final scenes of violence—which disappointed the hopes and blighted the hearts of a good many representative men of the time. They did not know exactly what was the matter with them, or what they wanted; but they felt vaguely that the world had missed its way and wandered with them into a sort of *cul-de-sac* in which nothing was worth

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while and life itself was no more than an eddy of purposeless dust. The number of those who thus felt their hearts bowed down was large ; but only a few of them were articulate ; and each of those who did speak out supposed that his own case stood alone and that none but he suffered from a disease which really was epidemic.

The first sufferer was probably Rousseau in the days of *Rêveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire* ; but he was mad. The second may have been Goethe ; but he made a quick and complete recovery. Ramond de Carbonnière, the pioneer of Pyrenean mountaineering, was sad as night, for no particular reason, in imitation of Goethe, when he wrote *Dernières aventures du jeune Olbon* ; but he, after a long walking tour in the Alps, learnt to consume his own smoke, and went over to the scientific camp. But then, a little later, in the first years of the nineteenth century, appeared the men with whom the malady was, or appeared to be, chronic ; the men with whom melancholy was either a fixed idea or a permanent pose of which they acquired the habit ; the men to whom life was always a thing to escape from, whether in the solitude of the wilderness or in the quiet of the library or in some kind of feverish activity which left no room for thought. Sénancour, Benjamin Constant, and Chateaubriand were the chief of them ; and we need not concern ourselves with any others. *Obermann*, *Adolphe*, and *René* are the three manifestoes to be compared.

*Obermann* has the truest ring, and yet is the most tedious to read. Sénancour has no definite story to tell, and no definite charge to bring against life. He writes of it merely, though at great length, as an evil



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dream which he cannot shake off. One may know, if one has read his life, that he made a foolish early marriage, and lost his fortune, and failed in all his undertakings ; and one may, if one likes, find in these causes a partial explanation of the sincerity of his despair. He says nothing of that himself, however, from youth to age, and chooses for the motto on his tombstone the famous : “ Eternité, deviens mon asyle.” There is no pose there, but the real gloom of a real René, pursued unflinchingly to its logical conclusion.

*Adolphe* is more definite ; and *Adolphe*, as we know from the *Journal Intime*, as well as from other sources, is the true story, save for the local colour, of the most passionate passage in Benjamin Constant's life—his intimacy with Madame de Staël. “ Here am I,” the author seems to say, “ an emotional bankrupt, and these are the precise circumstances which caused me to file my petition.” At any rate, we know that he filed it, and that, to continue the metaphor, he never obtained his discharge. His life was always, as he put it, “ unarrangeable,” even when he was a great Parliamentary leader, and even when he was married to a devoted wife who did her best to make him happy. Failing to arrange it, he sought his escape from it in gambling. But he never posed ; he never boasted ; he never struck attitudes or invited the world to look and see what a miserable wretch he was—exceptionally miserable because of his exceptional sensibility ! Chateaubriand in *René*, and not only in *René*, did all these things.

George Sand has pictured René as “ the wounded eagle which will presently resume its flight.” It is a sound criticism, though easy to pass in the light of

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Chateaubriand's subsequent career ; but it does not cover all the ground. René, coming of a sturdy race of Breton sailors, was assuredly stronger than either Adolphe or Obermann ; but he differed from them in other ways as well. He differed from Adolphe in regarding the sorrows of his soul from the outside, in the spirit of the spectator of a theatrical performance. He differed from Obermann in the fact that the world was with him in the wilderness, and that, even in the solitude of North American forests, he still kept his finger on the beating pulse of life.

Hence his recovery. The forest itself, he found, was not an escape from life, but one of life's *culs-de-sac* ; and he realized the fact readily, and acted on it at once. He needed scope for his abounding energy ; and he also needed an audience to play to and a gallery to applaud. It was by reading a newspaper that he perceived his chance ; and he returned to Europe to act, to think, and to develop—to fight for the Bourbons, and preach, though hardly to act upon, the Christian creed. He was René still in certain moods ; but he was René with a difference : a René who had done things, and meant to do them ; a converted René followed by “a complete militia of drawing-room Christians” ; a René who could smile, and seemed willing to give a fair trial to the illusions which, in the pessimism of his youth, he had affected to dismiss untried. His temperamental gloom, that is to say, was a barrier more apparent than real between himself and the rest of the world. There seemed more than a chance that, if it could not be taken by assault, it might at least be sapped and undermined.

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Women, one knows, are exceedingly apt to look upon such a man as what missionaries call "a field of usefulness." They are not, indeed, attracted by the melancholy disillusion which they believe to be sincere and impervious to argument ; they call that misogyny, and they pass it by on the other side. But the pose which can be regarded as a mask or a challenge is a different matter—especially if the wearer of the mask be a man of striking presence, grand manners, unimpeachable genius, and undeniable distinction. Such a man, it is felt, needs and deserves the help of beautiful women in bearing the burden of his sorrows. It is offered to him freely, and he rarely refuses to accept it, even though he professes to attach little value to it. He has but to smile, and the women rally round him, even though they know, from their own and each other's experience, that his love, or what passes for such, is not a gift, but a loan that will presently be called in.

They rallied in that way round Rousseau, who was ugly and very far from a gentleman, and was known to be living connubially with a servant maid. "All the women of Paris," says Hume, "ran after him ;" and Madame de Genlis reports a fashionable lady's opinion that "a woman would have to be very virtuous indeed not to be willing to devote her life to Rousseau if she were fully persuaded that he loved her." In the case of Chateaubriand, who had all the advantages which nature and education had withheld from Rousseau, devotion was not even qualified by that proviso. Women did not wait to see whether he loved them sincerely or not before electing to sit at his feet. They sat at his feet and waited for his love ; they

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continued to sit at his feet after it had been made clear that his love, if ever bestowed on them, had been withdrawn.

The years now under review are the years in which that homage was most steadily paid and most amiably and gratefully received—partly, no doubt, because Chateaubriand, at the apogee of his literary renown, had nothing to do but to receive it, but partly also because the homage of beautiful women was a means of consolidating his influence, and a stepping stone in the ascent of that pedestal from which Madame de Boigne saw him looking down upon his age.

These admirers of her husband appear in Madame de Chateaubriand's correspondence as "the madames." It is not easy to make out either how much she knew about their devotion or how much she cared. Apparently she did not go very far out of her way to ascertain anything that was not thrust actually under her eyes; and her general tone is merely one of contempt for a frivolous society of which she cannot see the charm. She is not actually angry, but she is a little—just a very little—spiteful. She cannot imagine what Chateaubriand sees in his "madames," but still—so one seems to read between the lines—if he will run after them, he must.

"There is nothing to be made of my *Chat*," she writes in one letter. "Yesterday he had promised to go and see the *Stag* (Joubert), and invite him to a delightful dinner of calf's liver. But not a bit of it. He ran about, calling on one madame after another, until five o'clock, and never gave a thought to his errand until I flew into a temper and reprimanded him."



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"The *Chat*," she writes again, "has rheumatism. In spite of that he is having his hair curled in order to visit certain madames called du Lionfort. However, while in the act of beautifying himself, he charges me to tell you. . . ."

Et cetera. The citations makes Madame de Chateaubriand's attitude tolerably clear; but the situation as a whole is clearer in the sparkling and critical pages of Madame de Boigne—

"It was at the time that Madame de X (Natalie de Noailles-Mouchy) began her retirement that the Society of the Madames was definitely formed. The chief members were the Duchesses de Duras and de Lévis,<sup>1</sup> and Madame de Bérenger; the other ladies are too unimportant to mention. These three ladies had each of them their special hour: M. de Chateaubriand was received, and they were at home to no one else; and goodness only knows what he had to suffer if he gave one of them some minutes that belonged to another. They were so proud of their success that their porters had orders to inform visitors that they were not at home because it was M. de Chateaubriand's hour, and it is said that the announcement was often prolonged beyond the due time, to make the greater impression. The scenes which these ladies made by their mutual reproaches became a source of general amusement. But every evening all recovered their good temper, and went off to pay the most assiduous attention to Madame de Chateaubriand,

<sup>1</sup> The Duc de Lévis had fought at Quiberon. Louis XVIII made him a peer of France.

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whom they overwhelmed with care and kindness. One day when she had caught a slight cold, she asserted that she had received five possets on one morning, accompanied by the most charming notes, which she displayed with amusing sarcasms."

Such is the most vivid contemporary picture of Chateaubriand's life—of one important aspect of it, at all events—during the years between the publication of *Les Martyrs* and the fall of the Empire. One of the women named—the Duchesse de Duras—played a very important part in his life; and to her a special chapter may be devoted.

## CHAPTER XVIII

The Duchesse de Duras—Her life in exile—How she met Chateaubriand—She is warned against him by Madame de la Tour du Pin—The inward struggle—Chateaubriand and Madame de Duras agree to be “brother and sister”—She interests herself in his financial difficulties—Formation of a joint stock company to pay his debts.

THE Duchesse de Duras was the daughter of the Comte de Kersaint, a Breton naval officer who distinguished himself in the West Indies and elsewhere, and whom Monge, when Naval Minister, promoted to the rank of vice-admiral in 1792. An enthusiast for the humanitarianism of the eighteenth century, he had written to Rousseau to denounce the iniquities of Clive in India. Embracing the principles of the Revolution, he drew the line at the execution of the King, and resigned his seat in the Legislative Assembly on the ground that he did not wish to be associated with “bloodthirsty men.” His own arrest, trial, and condemnation followed as a matter of course; and he was conducted to the guillotine on December 5, 1793.

His only daughter, Claire de Kersaint, was born at Brest on March 22, 1777, and received the usual convent education. She and her mother, a West Indian heiress, whom her father had lately divorced, were at Bordeaux when the news of his death reached them. They obtained passports and went to the United States, but soon returned to Europe, and, after a

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brief sojourn in Switzerland, settled in London in 1795. They were there, that is to say, at the same time as Chateaubriand, though, moving in wealthier circles, they never met him.

It was in London that Mademoiselle de Kersaint made the acquaintance of Amédée de Duras, a grandson of the Maréchal de Duras, who commanded the troops during the riots at Rennes which preluded the Revolution. He himself had been sent by Louis XVI on a secret mission to Vienna, and warned not to return. Probably he was attracted by the fortune no less than by the charms of Mademoiselle de Kersaint, to whom the exiled Archbishop of Aix married him in 1797; but the union was more than ordinarily happy. Madame de Duras' letters to her husband are those of a devoted wife; and eleven years were to elapse before the old affection was to be clouded, in so far as it ever was clouded, by the new infatuation.

It was not until 1808 that the Duc and Duchesse de Duras returned to France and definitely settled at the Château d'Ussé in Touraine. Ussé was near Méreville; and Méreville was the seat of the Laborde family, to which Natalie de Noailles-Mouchy belonged; and the Labordes were cousins of M. de Duras. It was inevitable that Madame de Duras should visit Méreville; and it was inevitable that she should meet Chateaubriand there, and be one of his audience when he read his unpublished works aloud. That was what happened; and then the struggle at once began in Madame de Duras' heart.

She had her confidante—her old school-fellow, Madame de la Tour du Pin, whose husband was Prefect



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of Brussels, and was presently to be Prefect of Amiens. She confided freely in her friend, telling her how she was distracted between the conflicting claims of duty and desire ; and she received in return many warnings, and even many entreaties, to be careful.

“ When you tell me,” wrote Madame de la Tour du Pin, “ that, if you had no other duties, your one thought would be to please M. de Chateaubriand, I feel no uneasiness on your behalf. That expression came not from your heart, but from your head. But why do you accuse me of detesting him ? I only object to him in so far as he is dangerous to you ; and I shall not like him until I am undeceived or reassured on that point.”

“ Banish as an evil thought,” she wrote again, “ all your boredom and all your disgust with your own home. Calm that excitable head which is the cause of your unhappiness. Find yourself some useful occupation. Remove from your table that eternal *Génie du Christianisme*, those *Martyrs*, and that *Itinéraire* which you know by heart. They are books to read through once or twice, not books to go on reading every day like the *Imitatio*.”

“ Friendship,” we read in a third letter, “ is something very different from the sentiment which you feel. Go away to Ussé, and *avoid saying good-bye* ! This is what I hear from Pauline (Madame de Cosse). ‘ Claire,’ she writes, ‘ is leaving us in the week of Quasimodo, terribly troubled that she has to depart before the great reception. She is happy, passionately

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in love, though she will not admit it even to herself, enjoying the full charm of her exalted sentiments, without allowing a single uneasiness or a single reproach to mingle with them. Her blindness saves her from all scruples, and her profound ignorance of herself assures her peace of mind and her happiness.' So you see how little pains you take to hide your feelings. Calm your heart if you can. Put away the thought of this man who is tormenting you. I am expecting time to do wonders for you."

And so forth ; and it seemed at first as if things were happening, and would happen, in such a way as to give Madame de la Tour du Pin full justification for her fears.

Chateaubriand had asked leave to call, and the leave had been accorded. Madame de Duras had invited him to dinner to meet the Duc and Duchesse de Laval and other aristocratic celebrities. He had declined, pleading that he was of a shy and retiring disposition, and asked if he might be permitted to lunch alone with her instead. "Let there be no ceremony," he wrote. "A cup of tea is all I want." It must certainly have looked, to impartial observers, as though the reign of Natalie de Noailles-Mouchy was over and a rival had usurped her place.

Perhaps, if Madame de Duras had been beautiful—but she was not. She was plain, and she was also scrupulous. Her head was turned ; her heart was touched ; but she remembered (or at least did not altogether forget) what was due to her husband, and also what was due to her friend. It may be—the tone of the correspondence suggests as much—that

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Chateaubriand did not insist very vehemently ; and it may also be that it was Madame de Duras' lack of beauty that induced him to moderate his claims. He accepted, at all events, her offer to be a "sister" to him ; and it is as "sister" that he addresses her in his letters. Even in that character she was able to do a great deal for him.

The letter has already been quoted in which he replies to her fears that his friendship for her may cause pain to Madame de Mouchy. She seems to have been convinced by his arguments—rather because she wished to be convinced than because they were conclusive ; and they began a long correspondence—more or less brotherly and sisterly—on all imaginable subjects : first on Chateaubriand's work, then on his mental troubles, disillusions, and disappointments, and finally on his pecuniary difficulties.

A letter written while the *Itinéraire* was at the printer's must be quoted for the sake of an allusion contained in it. Madame de Duras, it seems, had feared that it would contain too pointed references to the climax of the pilgrimage by the Fountain of the Lions ; but Chateaubriand reassures her—

"No, I have not put in the book anything that I ought not to have put in it. It is the history of my thoughts and emotions during a year of my life among the ruins of Athens and Jerusalem ; but nothing that I ought to keep for myself and my own heart will appear in it, and if this *Itinéraire* brings me no glory, it will at least, I think, win the love of generous souls capable of appreciating elevated sentiments."

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That is the most direct reference to Natalie de Noailles-Mouchy ; and Madame de Duras seems to have been brought round to the view that she could discharge her obligations to Natalie by feeling sorry for her, and that her duty towards Chateaubriand was more urgent. She may have found a reason (or an excuse) in the "strangeness" of Natalie's manner, and have felt (or persuaded herself that she felt) sorry for Chateaubriand also. Here is a letter in which we find him asking for his "sister's" sympathy on these as well as other grounds—

"When I find that I have failed, at the age which I have reached, in spite of all my efforts, to win the devotion of a heart of which I can be sure, or to create a career for myself, or to attain either to peace of mind or to fortune, I cannot help abandoning myself to melancholy. Really I do not know what will become of me, or how I shall end my days. Some day or other I shall come to the end of my resources, and, as the ties that might have held me bound are ready to break at any moment, I shall have no choice but to commit myself to the hazards of a fresh destiny."

Which means apparently that Chateaubriand wants money, and also wants to love again. We find a fresh reference to his love affairs in a letter of January 20, 1813—

"A thousand troubles worry, distress, and trouble me. Yesterday—to name but one of them—I received my formal dismissal ; and I accepted it, for, in truth,



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everything has to come to an end. I do not know whether I shall be recalled ; but I do know that I have had to put up with more of this sort of thing than I can stand."

And then, a few days later, after he has been "recalled," evidently against his will, and after Madame de Duras has, apparently, taken it upon herself to admonish him—

"What I want above all things is a quiet life. The young sailors love the winds and the tempests ; but the old slaves who have toiled at the oar in the galley, as I have, know that the calm is better. I hope my sister will not scold me any more."

In other letters Chateaubriand speaks of his disgust with life, his desire for solitude, and the difficulty which he finds in making friends. He is only, he says, "a machine for turning out books." He desires nothing except "a desert, a library, and a lady companion." At all events, he desired such things in the past, though he is not so sure that they would make him happy now. Anyhow, it is useless for his sister to lecture him. For "men of letters"—whose society his sister seems to have implored him to cultivate—he feels "the most profound hatred and contempt." He carries his disdain for them to the point of leaving unanswered "three-fourths of the letters of admiration which I get from them" ; and he is "moved to tears" whenever he receives news of "a baptism or a marriage." But he cherished one aspiration. If only he could have his sister for his private secretary ! If

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only, failing that, she would at least come and live near him !

For life without her is a weariness and a burden. The days are long, and "seem as if they would last for ever." He is growing old and "growing bald," and "falling into his dotage"—

"I am a nuisance to others, and a nuisance to myself. One of these fine mornings, I shall catch a fever and be carried off; and who, dear sister, will remember me then? A few books which I shall have left behind me, and which people will have ceased to read, will arouse a little controversy at the moment of my departure. Some people will say that they are valueless and will not survive me; others that perhaps, after all, there was something in them; and that will be the conclusion of the whole matter. The readers will close the books, and go out to dinners and dances; and brothers and sisters will write each other letters on all sorts of subjects without any thought of me. My valley will be sold to a bourgeois who will make wine where I have planted trees—and such is the life of man."

This from a man of forty-four, whose literary reputation stood higher than that of any other living Frenchman—who stood upon a pedestal, worshipped by women, and looking down upon his age. Madame de Duras, like the practical sister that she was, read a meaning into the tirade, and saw by what line of approach she could best come to the rescue. An active career—that was the chief thing needful. Chateaubriand must be pushed, as soon as possible,

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into politics ; and, as that, for the moment, was not possible, his debts must, in the meanwhile, be paid for him.

There is a calumnious story to the effect that Chateaubriand's debts were paid for him by the Government, related in the *Mémoires* of Comte Ferrand, who was Minister of State under Louis XVIII. It is told as a partial explanation of the King's dislike of him—

“A few years previously,” writes Comte Ferrand, “there had been some question of his nomination to the French Academy. The question was treated as if he were being solicited to grant a favour, and he himself viewed it in that light. He demanded, as a condition of consenting to be nominated, that his debts should be paid for him ; they amounted to 70,000 francs. The payment was agreed to, and was made in two instalments by Maret, Duc de Bassano.”

The story is improbable on the face of it. There is no tittle of evidence in favour of it, and there is abundant evidence against it. At the very moment of the alleged payment we find Chateaubriand writing to his friend M. Frisell that he is “penniless.” We find him at the same date “pawning” the manuscript of *Le dernier Abencérage*, and then borrowing money from M. de Tocqueville in order to take it out of pawn. We find him further writing to Madame de Duras that he is “not gay,” for—

“My affairs are in a very bad way. I can come to no arrangement ; and the future before me is so

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troubled and so dark that I can see no means of escaping the catastrophe with which I am threatened."

Those were his circumstances when early in 1812 Madame de Duras came to the rescue in a manner which proved her to be, not only a sympathetic sister, but also a woman of sound common-sense and remarkable business ability.

The debts were variously estimated by the debtor, according to his moods and his memory, at anything from twelve to forty thousand francs; probably the latter figure was the nearer to accuracy. His devoted nephew, Christian de Chateaubriand, offered to get married and pay them out of his wife's dowry; but Chateaubriand would not accept that sacrifice. Marriage, he said, was "the worst of all calamities," and Christian had better remain single. He expected, he told Madame de Duras, "a serious offer from a foreign country less ungrateful and more generous than my own"; he proposed to close with it and escape from his embarrassments in that way. But Madame de Duras would not hear of such a step. She had thought out a more practical and ingenious plan, and conceived the idea, commonly supposed to be modern and Gilbertian, of floating an author as a joint stock company.

It was not a scheme to be carried through in a day. Chateaubriand was sceptical of its success. "What!" he writes, "you are really going to find me fifteen thousand francs! It is incredible;" and he depicted his necessities in many painful letters while the negotiations were pending. He will be "the happiest man in the world," he vows, if only he is



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enabled to retain possession of his piece of land and his books. Meanwhile he doubts whether he will be able to afford to pay certain promised visits to his friends, "for I am so poor that I do not know whether I shall have the money for my travelling expenses." And then, again, in 1813—

"For want of money I have had to give up my visit to a watering-place, and all my plans of travel. I am here, confined to my desert, and working at my history. . . . I have no news to send you of our little coterie, and I never hear anything of any human being except that some of my creditors from time to time show signs of life. It helps to pass an hour or two, as some one said of his experiences in the torture chamber."

But meanwhile Madame de Duras was working, wheedling, corresponding, and arranging. She got together ten shareholders, including herself, Christian and Louis de Chateaubriand, and the Duc and Duchesse de Laval. They paid up their subscriptions and their calls, securing themselves by a mortgage on Chateaubriand's future work. The more pressing creditors received something on account at once; the whole of the debts were eventually extinguished; and Chateaubriand was able to sit down at La Vallée-aux-Loups, in such peace as a vexatious Government allowed him, and write historical studies and a tragedy based on the life of Moses, while the Battle of the Nations raged at Leipzig, and the subsequent invasion of France by the allied armies brought about the downfall of the Empire.

## CHAPTER XIX

Life at La Vallée-aux-Loups—Chateaubriand's prediction of Napoleon's fall—The events of 1814—Chateaubriand's pamphlet, *De Bonaparte et des Bourbons*—The danger of writing it—The Restoration—The influence of Madame de Duras—Chateaubriand's appointment as Ambassador to Sweden—His urgent appeals for an augmentation of salary—Napoleon escapes from Elba—Louis XVIII starts for Ghent—Chateaubriand follows him.

THE nets were, at last, closing round Napoleon; and there can be no reader whom it is necessary to remind that 1812 was the year of the campaign of Russia, 1813 the year of the campaign of Germany, and 1814 the year of the campaign of France. Chateaubriand seems to have been one of those who foresaw the end even before the calamitous retreat from Moscow, though not one of those who perceived how "the Spanish ulcer" would contribute to it. "His fate," he told a certain M. Genoude who conversed with him at La Vallée-aux-Loups, "will be that of Crassus. The Russians will retire before him like the Parthians, and this will be the rock on which his power will split."

Two years, however, were to elapse before that was to happen; and the *Mémoires* tell us practically nothing of Chateaubriand's life during the period, except that Napoleon first smiled on him and then frowned—talked of creating an office for him, at a

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princely salary, as Superintendent of the Libraries of France, and then sent him orders, through M. Pasquier, the Prefect of Police, who was his personal friend, to leave Paris at once. He went to Dieppe, where, long since, as a young officer in the royal service, he had drilled recruits on the beach, but was allowed to return after a month's exile. Pasquier remained his friend and came to see him. "But even when he called on his friends," writes Madame de Chateaubriand, "Pasquier did not forget his trade. I found him one day reading a manuscript which he had fished out from its hiding-place under the sofa."

From Madame de Chateaubriand again we get a pleasant picture of Chateaubriand feeling ill, and believing that he was on the point of death, and of the "madames" displaying what she considered a "fussy" interest in his health. She was herself quite sure, she says, that he was only suffering from "nerves"; but Madame de Lévis was tormented by anxiety, and insisted that he should see the celebrated physician, Dr. Laennec. She even brought her carriage and insisted on driving him, there and then, to the consulting-room. Madame de Chateaubriand "let him go," but was quickly stricken by remorse, and followed in hot haste.

"I concealed myself," she writes, "until after the consultation was over. Laennec arrived. I cannot describe the agonies which I endured until his departure. I lay in wait for him as he was going out, and asked him what was the matter with my husband. 'Nothing at all,' he answered, and wished me good-day, and walked off. And sure enough, five minutes

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afterwards, I heard the invalid singing as he came down the stairs."

Nothing was the matter with him, it appeared, except a slight touch of rheumatism, which he had mistaken for an aneurism of the heart. Possibly the rheumatism affected his temper, for, a few days later, we find Madame de Chateaubriand writing to Joubert—

"We expect to be in Paris in a fortnight's time, and I shall be glad to get there. I make that confession to you alone, for how shall I venture to say to any one else that I am boring myself with M. de Chateaubriand at Val de Loup? If I did so, a dozen madames would scratch my face, and even tear out my heart, if they still believed, after such an avowal, that I had one."

It was at about this date, too, that Chateaubriand finished his *Moses*; but about that the less said the better, for it is a dull work and adds nothing to his glory.<sup>1</sup> Even Madame de Duras did not pretend to admire it. Nor need we pause over Sismondi's picture of him, "talking about religion in Madame Duras' drawing-room," and exhibiting "much inconsistency and far more bad faith than I should have expected from him." Religion was no longer the topic of the hour, and Chateaubriand had a journalist's *flair* for actualities. The pressing questions were, or were soon to be, political. The feeling was in the air that the Empire was on its last legs, and that the

<sup>1</sup> *Moses* was ultimately produced, in the reign of Louis-Philippe, at Versailles, but failed hopelessly.



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time for taking sides was near at hand. That was Chateaubriand's opportunity.

It was not only the devout women who looked to him for guidance. The "Catholic drawing-room militia" were also disposed to accept him as a leader. They remembered that he had quitted the imperial service on account of the Duc d'Enghien's execution; they remembered the sardonic article which had caused the confiscation of the *Mercur*; they remembered the suppressed address to the Academy. He was a man whose voice, when he had the chance of speaking out, was always heard. If, therefore, he now wrote and published a pamphlet—— He sat down to the task, writing "like the last of the Romans in the midst of the barbarian invasion."

The undertaking was not without its risks. Napoleon was not yet beaten to his knees. He was still winning battles though he was losing the campaign; and his vengeance on pamphleteers could be swift and terrible. For a much milder pamphlet than that which Chateaubriand had in hand, he had ordered Berthier to have Palm the publisher shot at Nuremberg; and the sentence had been carried out within three hours of the trial. Nor could the pamphleteer even flatter himself that he would be safe as long as his pamphlet remained in manuscript. Domiciliary visits were always possible, and spies abounded. If Pasquier should once more come to dinner and look for manuscripts under the sofa!

So Chateaubriand took such precautions as occurred to him—precautions which suggest the cloaked conspirators of comic opera—sleeping with his manuscript under his pillow and a brace of loaded pistols on the

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table by his bed-side ; but even so he was not careful enough to satisfy his wife. In this enterprise, at any rate, her sympathies were with him—very likely it was an enterprise which she believed to have been foreshadowed in the Revelation of St. John the Divine ; and she tells us how, knowing the peril, she lived in fear and trembling—

“Often, when he went out, he forgot his papers and left them on the table. Even when he was so prudent as to hide them under the pillow, he did so in the presence of a man-servant, who, though an honest fellow, might not have been proof against temptation. Consequently I lived in a state of hysterical alarm, and, whenever he left the room, I took the manuscript and concealed it about my person.

“One day, while crossing the Tuileries gardens, I perceived that I had not got it. I was positive that I had taken it with me, and could not doubt that I had lost it in the street. I pictured it already in the hands of the police and M. de Chateaubriand under arrest. So I fainted in the middle of the garden, and some worthy people picked me up and carried me home. . . .

“As I approached my husband’s room I nearly fainted again. At last I entered—and there was nothing on the table. I went up to the bed, passed my hands over the pillow—and could feel nothing. Then I lifted the pillow—and there was the roll of paper. My heart still palpitates whenever I think of it. Never in my life have I felt such a shock of joy.”

Thus, while the ring of foreign bayonets was narrowing round the capital, the pamphlet *De Bonaparte*

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*et des Bourbons* was finished and even printed. The allies having entered Paris on March 31, 1814, Chateaubriand published it on April 5. It was, of course, a glowing royalist manifesto, and a rhetorical denunciation of the Empire and all its works. "I flung it," says Chateaubriand, "into the balance. The whole world knows what an effect it had."

Its effect may have seemed to be greater than it actually was. Talleyrand's defection and intrigues did a good deal more than Chateaubriand's burning words to determine the course of events; and his eloquence in fact only supported a cause that was already won. But it had its value none the less in whipping up enthusiasm, and it was warmly appreciated by the returning royal exiles. Louis XVIII read the pamphlet, and said that it had been of as much service to his cause as an additional army corps. Chateaubriand, in short, found himself the hero of the hour, and believed, for the moment, that his political fortune was made.

He soon discovered his mistake. Louis XVIII, though complimentary to him about his pamphlet, did not like him. He regarded him as a poet, and he said to his intimates: "Never let poets be mixed up in public affairs. They ruin everything. Poets are no good." Moreover, there were many applicants for all the offices, and Legitimists could not be allowed to monopolize them. It was not their loyalty but the defection of the Bonapartists that had given the King his own again; and the latter had to be considered first in the distribution of the spoils. They claimed, indeed, to take the lead, not only in public functions, but also in popular demonstrations of enthusiasm;

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and Madame de Chateaubriand draws a graphic picture of Madame Talleyrand driving slowly through the streets of Paris in an open carriage, and singing hymns in honour of "the pious Bourbons."

Nor was that all. Bonapartist enthusiasts for the restored monarchy went so far, one day, as to invade the apartments of the Chateaubriands and request them to honour the Bourbons by draping the windows with white flags. When assured that there were no white flags in the house, they implored them, as a *pis-aller*, at least to hang out some of Madame de Chateaubriand's white underclothing; and Madame de Chateaubriand needed all her petulance and all her firmness to resist the strange request.

Such were the picturesque circumstances in which Chateaubriand discovered that the King had no intention of doing anything for him if he could help it. The Duc de Duras, however, was not only a peer of France, but had also been named First Gentleman of the Chamber in the Royal Household, and assigned apartments in the two palaces of the Tuileries and Saint-Cloud; and the Duchesse de Duras had been one of the first of the great ladies of the Faubourg Saint-Germain to seek the honour of being received by the King at Compiègne. She was now, therefore, at last in a position to pull wires, and Chateaubriand appealed to her to do so. On October 6 he wrote to her at Dieppe.

He had written an article for the *Débats*, he said, which had made a great sensation. The King had been so pleased with it that he had sent the Minister of Police to thank him for it, and copies of the paper



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containing it had gone to a premium and fetched as much as five francs. Evidently he was the only political writer to whom the public was disposed to listen. The Government ought to give him a good appointment at home, so that his pen might be a weapon always ready to their hands. And so: "Come back and work for me. . . . Lose no time in coming."

She came, and visited him at La Vallée-aux-Loups, and told him that she was doing her best and hoped for good results. Persuaded that his dreams were coming true, he appealed to her to "buy the house next door to me and pull down the party wall"; but at the same time he protested that, if his dreams did not come true, he would retire to Switzerland in dudgeon. "Perhaps," he reflects in the *Mémoires*, "it would have been well for me if I had done so. Should I not have been happier in those deserts to which Napoleon proposed to send me as his ambassador to the mountains than I have been in the Palace of the Tuileries?" But that is the voice of René rather than of Chateaubriand. What Chateaubriand wanted at the moment was not solitude, but office—high office with emoluments proportionate to its dignity.

Madame de Duras could, to a certain extent, influence M. de Blacas<sup>1</sup>; and M. de Blacas could, to a certain extent, influence the King. The result was that "they unearthed a vacant embassy—the

<sup>1</sup> The Duc de Blacas was then head of Louis XVIII's household, and afterwards served as Minister at Naples. His extreme royalist and clerical opinions made him unpopular, and most of the other ministers objected on that account to have him as a colleague. He attended Charles X in exile.

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embassy to the Court of Sweden." That was all, and it seemed disappointingly little; for Stockholm was a remote, insignificant, hyperborean capital, and the salary of the French ambassador to Sweden was only 33,000 francs. In his next letter, therefore, Chateaubriand mourns over the prospect of being torn away from his dear home, recalls the sentimental memories connected with it, and then proceeds to a practical review of his pecuniary situation.

He is thinking, he says, of the long days "passed in the hope of seeing Natalie for a moment alone"—the days when he "dreamt of her and *Les Martyrs*,"—the days when he was "in love, inspired, unfortunate, yet happy"—

"And to-day I am ambassador to Sweden! A pretty end to it all! I am to abandon my work, my dreams, and everything! Ah, my poor valley, when shall I see you again? Never, I dare say. How old I am getting! How far behind me I have left all that! I no longer feel that I live, and the remainder of my life is not worth living. I ought to have died on the day on which the King entered Paris."

And then follow the pecuniary details.

Thirty-three thousand francs! What can a man do—what at any rate can an ambassador do—with thirty-three thousand francs? He will have to spend twenty thousand francs at least on plate, linen, horses, and carriages. That will leave him thirteen thousand francs—£520—to live on. How can an ambassador live on the ridiculous sum of £520 a year? It is

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preposterous—especially if the ambassador has debts ; and Chateaubriand is obliged to admit to Madame de Duras that he has many. He presents her with a statement of his assets and liabilities.

With the proceeds of the subscriptions of the joint stock company and of the sale of the *Itinéraire* he has paid off debts to the amount of fifty-four thousand francs ; but other debts have since accumulated. He owes ten thousand francs borrowed on the security of M. de Tocqueville's name from Madame de Coislin. He has mortgaged La Vallée-aux-Loups for a loan of twenty thousand francs, and he has given various creditors bills amounting in all to fifteen thousand francs. His total liability, therefore, is forty-five thousand francs, with interest running at the rate of seven per cent. ; and he has no assets whatsoever except the manuscript of *Le dernier Abencérage*, but recently redeemed from pawn. He must have a "gratuity" or go under. "So," he concludes, "you must use all your influence and get them to give me a hundred thousand francs."

That was more, however, than Madame de Duras was able to do—at all events in the time at her disposal. She was still at work, and Chateaubriand was still in Paris, awaiting the result of her solicitations, when Napoleon escaped from Elba and landed at Fréjus, and bade the eagle of the Empire "fly from steeple to steeple until it reaches the towers of Notre Dame."

We need not follow the rapid history of those exciting days. Enough to note that Madame de Duras remembered Chateaubriand in the midst of

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the turmoil, and rendered him a last service on the very eve of the flight of the royal family.

The King, after announcing his intention to remain and resist, had decided at the eleventh hour to retreat. The news was brought to Madame de Duras in her apartment in the Tuileries, and she instantly went to see M. de Vitrolles, the Head of the King's Household, and M. d'André, the Director-General of the Police. Had they, she asked, or had they not considered the danger to which they were exposing M. de Chateaubriand? They replied that they had not, and then she insisted that they must. Napoleon's first thought on re-entering Paris would assuredly be to order M. de Chateaubriand to be shot; and M. de Chateaubriand was unable to seek safety in flight because he had no money. Could he not be sent on a special mission to Vienna and paid for his services in advance?

No, replied M. de Vitrolles, he could not; and then Madame de Duras fainted in M. de Vitrolles' arms, and M. de Vitrolles had to lay her on a sofa and apply restoratives, and sent for the doctor. Then she recovered consciousness and renewed her eloquent entreaties. Something had to be done to pacify her, and time was precious, and there was a little public money in the Treasury, and it might just as well be given to Chateaubriand as left for Napoleon to seize. So apparently M. de Vitrolles argued; and the upshot of the strange interview was that Madame de Duras carried off in triumph the sum of twelve thousand francs—an advance payment on account of Chateaubriand's services in connection with the Embassy of



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which it was known that Napoleon would, as a matter of course, deprive him before two days had passed.

At any rate, however, thanks to Madame de Duras, he had money enough for his immediate needs, and could hire a carriage and drive to Belgium.

## CHAPTER XX

The Hundred Days—Chateaubriand at Ghent—The news of the Battle of Waterloo—The scramble for offices—The return to Paris—Fouché and Talleyrand—The Duc de Richelieu—Chateaubriand's disappointment—His pecuniary troubles—He sells La Vallée-aux-Loups and starts *Le Conservateur*.

CHATEAUBRIAND would not go until he knew that the King had gone; and as the King was proposing to go secretly, he sat up all night with the horses ready and his luggage stowed away in the carriage. At four o'clock in the morning a messenger whom he had instructed to watch brought him word that the King had started. Then Madame de Chateaubriand, trembling for his safety, pushed him into the vehicle, and he drove off on the road to Tournai—the very route, he recalls, which he had taken when he went into exile for the first time and fought in the army of Condé with the manuscript of *Atala* in his knapsack. From Tournai he went to Brussels, and thence—thanks once again to the insistence of Madame de Duras—he was summoned to join the King at Ghent.

Louis XVIII had established himself in the Flemish town in the proud style of a Bourbon who can learn nothing and forget nothing, but must still, in the darkest hour of his fortunes, regard himself as the King of kings. When other kings—the kings who had propped up his tottering throne and lifted

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him on to it—accepted his invitation to dinner, he haughtily preceded them to the refectory. When the Duke of Wellington, who was to be the chief instrument of his restoration, passed him in the street, he saluted him with a patronizing nod ; and even in his precarious place of refuge, from which he might be driven at any moment, he abated no jot of his pretensions as a son of Saint Louis, but formed a cabinet and surrounded himself with a Court.

It was a dilapidated cabinet and a ragged Court. One member of the Court—the Duc de Lévis—was so ragged that he had to borrow Chateaubriand's stockings before he could enter the royal presence, and even so appeared before the King in wooden shoes. Still, there, in the midst of alarms, were all the paraphernalia of majesty. A small army of two hundred loyal French soldiers was encamped near Ghent, and could render the requisite military honours ; and Chateaubriand himself, who carried the whole of his own and Madame de Chateaubriand's wardrobe in one valise, kissed hands on his appointment, *ad interim*, to the office of Minister of the Interior.

Of course there was no work to do, and, equally of course, there was no salary to draw, so Chateaubriand went fishing and dined out. He describes what we should nowadays call a “freak dinner” of nine courses, “beginning with jam and ending with cutlets.” His favourite retreat, he says, was the garden of the *béguinage*—“a calm enclosure sheltered from the storm like the land-locked gulfs of Africa,” where, as author of *Le Génie du Christianisme*, he received the homage of the pious.

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"Wherever I go among Christians," he writes, "the curés present themselves to me. Then come the mothers bringing their little ones and bidding them recite to me my chapter on the First Communion. My passage through a Catholic town is announced like that of a missionary or a doctor of the soul. This double reputation is very touching to me. It is my only pleasant recollection. All the rest is painful."

But one has one's doubts about that. For the moment, at any rate, religion was a matter of secondary importance, and Chateaubriand had other things to think of.

"Madame de Duras had come to join her husband, and was one of our party of exiles. I must complain no more of my misfortunes, seeing that I passed three months in the society of this excellent woman conversing of all the subjects suggested to upright hearts by a conformity of tastes, ideas, principles, and sentiments. Madame de Duras was ambitious on my behalf. She alone recognized from the first my potential capacity for politics."

The exiled Court, in fact, was a nest of political intrigue. *In utrumque paratus* was the motto of all but the most loyal; and while the King awaited the issue of the Waterloo campaign, with the Crown jewels packed in readiness for instant flight if Napoleon's cavalry should come raiding in that direction, the men who faced both ways, like Talleyrand and Fouché, were sending their confidential emissaries in the hope of



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extracting their personal profit from the issue, whatever it might be.

On the day of the great battle Chateaubriand pictures himself walking on the road from Ghent to Brussels, reading Cæsar's *Commentaries*, until a sound which he divined to be the distant roar of artillery fell upon his ears.

“The silent and solitary auditor of this formidable settlement of our destinies, I should have felt far less emotion if I had found myself in the midst of the affray. The perils, the fire, the confusion would have left me no time to think. Alone under a tree, in the open country near Ghent, I was overwhelmed by the weight of my reflections. What battle was this? And was its issue to be final? Was Napoleon there in person? And were the Powers casting lots for the world as for the robe of Christ? Whoever won, or lost, would the result be the liberty of the peoples or their enslavement? Was this a new Crécy, a new Poitiers, a new Agincourt for the most implacable of enemies of France? If the allies triumphed, was not our glory lost? But if Napoleon won, where was our freedom?”

So he meditated, and a courier galloped by and stopped to tell him that Napoleon had won and had entered Brussels in triumph. He hurried back to Ghent and found that the news had preceded him. The gates of the town were closed, and there was a general *sauf qui peut*. Those who were ready to go were going, and those who were not ready were

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hurrying their preparations. Horses had been harnessed to the wagon containing the royal jewels. Chateaubriand himself "stuffed his night-cap into his ministerial portfolio" and placed himself at the disposition of his sovereign. Not until the arrival of a letter from Pozzo di Borgo<sup>1</sup> was the truth known; and then the King turned his steps towards Paris, and the scramble for offices began.

It would be too long a business to enter into the details of that scramble; but the essential facts are these: Chateaubriand lacked the suppleness of a courtier and was too fond of repeating that it was his pamphlet that had recovered the Bourbons their crown. The King did not like him, and his hands were not quite free, for there were many applicants for the most responsible appointments. Some of the applicants were more necessary than others, and some of them succeeded in representing themselves as more necessary than they actually were. In the last category were included Fouché the regicide and Talleyrand the turncoat; and it was in their favour that Chateaubriand was pushed aside. He was furiously angry, and, nursing his indignation, avenged himself in a mordant phrase. He pictures himself, in the *Mémoires*, waiting in the King's antechamber for an audience—

"No one was there. I sat down in a corner of the room and waited. Of a sudden a door opens. There silently enters Vice leaning on the arm of Crime—M. Fouché supporting M. de Talleyrand.

<sup>1</sup> A Corsican in the Russian service. After the Restoration he served as Russian Ambassador both in Paris and in London.

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The infernal vision passes slowly before me and disappears into the royal cabinet."

Decidedly it was not only in his religious writings that Chateaubriand was skilled in the use of "images," though, as it was under Talleyrand's administration that he was made a peer of France, one might have expected him to employ them more moderately in this instance.

As for his own policy, one may follow his career very carefully and yet fail to make head or tail of it unless one takes the personal equation for one's clue. He was an ultra-Royalist because he had written *Bonaparte et les Bourbons*; but he also desired the freedom of the Press because he was a journalist. As the author of *Le Génie du Christianisme*, he fought the battles of the Holy Alliance; but he drifted into Liberalism by opposing his personal enemies. For the rest, he seems sometimes to have taken his opinions from his epigrams, and sometimes to have allowed them, albeit unconsciously, to be determined by the necessities of his ambition. The one charge which cannot stand, though it has been made, is that he was influenced by his need of money. He was always more ready to ask for money than to do anything, or even to think anything, in return for it, and a *coup d'éclat* always tempted him more than the emoluments of an assured position.

It was for the sake of a *coup d'éclat* that he risked and lost his peerage and the pension attached to it. At first he had been both glad and proud to be a peer. His habits and his manners, he writes, adapted

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him for the distinction ; but he found that he did not shine in the position and got little out of it but his stipend. He was a poor debater, and his florid speeches, carefully prepared and read from a manuscript, made little impression. The Duc de Richelieu, who succeeded Talleyrand as Prime Minister, did nothing for him. The feeling grew upon him that, unless he definitely asserted himself, he would be definitely shelved. He asserted himself in a sensational pamphlet: *De la monarchie selon la Charte*; and then the blow fell. The pamphlet was confiscated, and the pamphleteer lost his income.

He seems to have had the whim, for a day or two, to console himself for his political failures by travelling with Madame de Duras. "When shall we start? When shall we get away from it all?" he wrote. She took him at his word, and was perfectly willing, her health furnishing the pretext, to make an appointment with him in Italy ; but the next letter ran : "My dear sister, how on earth can I come to you? Here I am, held fast by a thousand ties, without money, without liberty, without the power of making up my mind to anything." Which clearly meant that he did not really want to go, unless he could go, as the next letter explains, in the character of Ambassador to Rome. "That," he writes, "would be the very thing for me. They ought to be glad to give me the post in order to get rid of me."

The honour was to come presently—but not yet, and not under that administration. In the meantime Chateaubriand needed money badly, and had to raise it as best he could. He obtained leave to organize a lottery for the sale of La Vallée-aux-Loups ; but



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only four tickets were taken. Then he sold the house by auction—"just as the houses of the poor are sold"—and Mathieu de Montmorency bought it for fifty thousand one hundred francs. Of his other financial transactions we get a glimpse in the *Memoirs* of Baron de Vitrolles—the same Baron de Vitrolles who had given him thirteen thousand francs on account of his salary as Ambassador to Sweden on the day before the flight to Ghent, and who was presently to be associated with him in a journalistic enterprise.

M. de Vitrolles called to condole with him on his sudden reverse of fortune. He had hurried back from the country on hearing the news, and he hoped to persuade Chateaubriand's colleagues to subscribe towards a pecuniary testimonial of their esteem.

"I found him," he writes, "gloomy as he generally was, and as the circumstances gave him the right to be. He was much more concerned about the diminution of his dignity than about the loss of his dignities; and, of a sudden, he pointed to an enormous book-case, all the shelves of which were empty.

"'Observe!'" he said in solemn accents. "'I have this morning sold my books in order to pay my butcher!'"

It was impressive, and M. de Vitrolles was impressed; but he adds that his colleagues did not share his sentiments to a sufficient degree to be willing to subscribe to the testimonial, and he goes on to tell

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another story of an application for help made to the Comte d'Artois, afterwards Charles X.

"Having several times exhausted the credit of the *entourage* of the Comte d'Artois, he came one morning to see me. His manner, usually pensive, was even more sombre than usual. He took my inquiries after the health of Madame de Chateaubriand as the text for a discourse on his destitute condition.

" 'She is very ill,' he said. 'The doctors order her to drink asses' milk, and I have not even fifty louis with which to buy an ass.'

"My first impulse was to assure him that it was unnecessary to buy an ass in order to procure a glass of ass's milk, and my second to go to my cash box and get him the sum which he required. After an instant's reflection, however, I realized that this was not what he wanted ; and then he begged me to lay his melancholy case before Monsieur.

"I promised to do so, and I waited on the Prince the very same evening.

" 'Well, my friend, what is your news to-day ?'

" 'Nothing of importance, Monseigneur.'

" 'But what is it ?'

" 'I saw Chateaubriand this morning.'

" 'And what had Chateaubriand got to say ?'

"I explained the nature of Chateaubriand's trouble.

" 'Bah !' replied Monsieur. 'It is every day the same story with him.'

" 'But Monsieur knows that the necessity for eating recurs every day.'

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“‘True. But he’s like a basket with a hole in the bottom of it.’

“‘A basket with a hole in the bottom of it, if Monsieur pleases; but when a basket is empty, it makes no difference whether there is a hole in the bottom of it or not.’

“‘But you see, my friend, I don’t like these continually repeated requests. It’s as bad as paying any one a pension, and when I hear the word pension it makes me skip.’ . . .

. . . “On the following day, however, he sent Chateaubriand two thousand francs with which to buy an ass.”

Such is M. de Vitrolles’ presentation of the lighter side of serious things; and this was one of the moments of Chateaubriand’s life at which he took sincerely serious views of nearly everything, and especially of political affairs. It is true that he already knew Madame Récamier—a branch of the subject to which it will be necessary to return; but women—even the most fascinating of them—played a smaller part in his life than they had played in the past and were to play yet again in the future. The tasks immediately before him, which almost monopolized his time and energies, were to provide himself with an income, and to fight the Government through the newspapers. To this end, with the financial help of M. le Normant, and the collaboration of MM. de Villèle, de Corbière, de Vitrolles, de Castelbajac, and others, he founded *Le Conservateur*.

“And so,” he writes, “the royalists owed it to me that they were able to recover from the insignificance

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into which they had fallen in the eyes alike of peoples and of kings. I placed a pen in the hands of the noblest families of France. I turned scions of the house of Montmorency and Lévis into journalists. I called up the reserves, and I summoned feudalism to march to the rescue of the liberty of the Press."



## CHAPTER XXI

Success of *Le Conservateur*—The colleagues—Villèle and Corbière—Assassination of the Duc de Berry—Fall of the Decazes Ministry—Villèle Prime Minister—Chateaubriand Minister to the Court of Prussia—His life at Berlin—The Duchess of Cumberland's friendship for him—His political ambitions—The Duchesse de Duras pulls wires for him—He succeeds Decazes as Ambassador to England.

CHATEAUBRIAND'S first thought was to retire to London and publish his paper there in order to avoid the censorship; "but fortunately," says Madame de Boigne, "the objections of Madame de Chateaubriand on the one hand and the entreaties of the madames on the other caused him to abandon the project." One may doubt whether he ever entertained it very seriously. At all events, he decided to stay in Paris, and his *Conservateur*, though it only lasted twenty months, became a property and a power. "The journal," he writes, "accomplished an incredible revolution. In France it altered the character of the majority in the Chamber of Deputies. Abroad it transformed the spirit of cabinets." He exaggerates, as usual, but hardly as much as usual.

The paper, according to M. de Vitrolles, who helped him to found it, was "a veritable gold mine." Every three months, he says, there was a profit of about £200 to be divided, and Chateaubriand took most of it. His colleagues also subscribed to his

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“charities,” which, M. de Vitrolles insists, began at home. “Under the pretext,” he declares, “of establishing an institution for the benefit of the aged and infirm, he built at the expense of his collaborators a charming villa, in which he lived for many years.”<sup>1</sup> He also, according to the same authority, put into his own pocket the twenty-four thousand francs provided by the Comte d’Artois as working capital, starting the paper on credit and making it pay its way. In one way or another, in fact, M. de Vitrolles assures us, he drew at least £4,000 before the paper ceased to appear. “His insatiable cupidity,” M. de Vitrolles concludes, “was the more shocking because it was in such flagrant contrast with the munificent generosity of his language.”

The main purpose of the publication, however, was not pecuniary, but political. It was the receptacle, says Madame de Boigne, of “the bilious eloquence of the *ultras*,” and “did the throne a vast amount of harm”; and she adds—what, as the intimate friend of Madame de Duras, she may be presumed to have known—that Chateaubriand “had nothing in common with” his collaborators.

“He did not share their prejudices or their feelings, their regrets or their hopes, their follies or even their probity. At no moment of his life was there a broader line of demarcation between the exigencies of his position and his opinions, tastes, and personal predilections. Most of the propositions which the others supported were repugnant to his judgment, and he would have been delighted to refute them if he had

<sup>1</sup> The Infirmerie Marie-Thérèse.

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been in power and called upon to fight on the other side. In fact, he was at this time in a very bad temper indeed."

The truth is, perhaps, that he was exploiting the *ultras*, but that his own colleagues were at the same time exploiting him. Notably he was exploited by Villèle and Corbière, who were shrewder than he was, though neither so brilliant nor so well known. Villèle, in particular, needed his help because, according to Madame de Boigne, "his low birth, his vulgar manners, his eccentric appearance, and his nasal intonation excluded him from the salons." Chateaubriand, therefore, acted as Villèle's drawing-room representative, while Villèle represented Chateaubriand in the Chamber of Deputies; and between them they built up a party which had to be reckoned with when the next ministerial crisis occurred.

The King himself saw what they were doing, and warned Decazes. "Beware of Chateaubriand," he said. "He has a sharp and vicious tooth." He had; and he used it with deadly effect, aided by the more cunning Villèle, on the tragic occasion of the murder of the Duc de Berry by Louvel outside the Opera House, in 1820.

There was no reason in the nature of things why the assassination should involve the retirement of Decazes. Louvel was probably a madman, and it was conclusively proved that he had no accomplices. There was no conspiracy in which the Government could be implicated, or which it could be said that the Government ought to have detected. But there was general consternation, and a general desire to hold

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somebody to blame; and Decazes was attacked accordingly. Chateaubriand's friend, Clausel de Coussergues, rose in the Chamber and spluttered charges of actual complicity in the crime. Villèle, perceiving the absurdity of that extravagance, whispered in his ear that "vagner" accusations would be more effective. Vagner charges of "treason" and the like were therefore substituted, and burst like a hail-storm about Decazes' head. He was obliged to offer his resignation, and the King was obliged to accept it. "His feet," wrote Chateaubriand, "slipped in the blood, and he fell."

That, of course, was nonsense. It was no more true to say that Decazes slipped in the victim's blood than it would have been to say that Chateaubriand and his friends hung on to the assassin's coat tails. He realized that in the course of time, and expunged the sentence from his writings. What actually happened, metaphor apart, was that Decazes was made French Ambassador to the Court of Saint James's, and that when the Duc de Richelieu undertook to form a fresh administration, he found Chateaubriand and his friends strong enough to dictate terms to him.

They were in the position, in short, which the Irish Parliamentary party has so long sought to attain in the English House of Commons—in a minority strong enough, that is to say, to enable the right to defeat the left or the left to defeat the right. Any Government that wished to stand firm must pacify them with office; so it was arranged, after negotiations which were in fact a trial of strength, that Corbière should be Minister of Education, that Villèle



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should enter the Cabinet without a portfolio, and that Chateaubriand should go as Minister Plenipotentiary to Berlin. "He was in no great hurry to start," writes Pasquier, the Minister of Foreign Affairs—the same Pasquier who, when invited to dinner, searched under the sofa for manuscripts—"but he managed to get there at last."

Which means, of course, that the Legation was not quite a big enough prize to content him, and that he found it hard and painful to tear himself away from Paris—and from Madame de Duras—and also from Madame Récamier. For their sakes—or for the sake of one or other of them—he would have preferred to stay; but he needed the salary, and therefore he accepted the office.

He left Paris on January 1, 1821; and his narrative now that he has left the stress of political strife behind, is once more like the pictorial chronicle of a shadow-play, or of some grave political procession. He might have seen Goethe at Weimar, but he did not: "here is a void in the pageant of illustrious personages who have defiled before my eyes." He might have visited Luther's grave at Wittenberg, but he passed by on the other side: "Protestantism, in religion, is only an illogical heresy, and, in politics, it is only a revolution that has failed." And so to the mansion Unter den Linden in Berlin, where he met Prince Augustus of Prussia, whom Madame de Récamier had refused to marry, and Chamisso, the traveller, who had found Madame Récamier's portrait on porcelain in Kamschatka, and Wilhelm von Humboldt, and other celebrities of the hour—where he was a flattered guest at *fêtes* and carnivals, and the *Morgenblatt*

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described his personal appearance in a fashion which shows that what we are accustomed to call the "new journalism" is really very old, speaking of "the burning passion and profound melancholy of his works," and going on—

"M. de Chateaubriand is of slight build, but slim. Melancholy and piety are expressed upon his oval countenance. His hair and his eyes are black. The latter shine with the fire of the genius which animates all his features."

He quotes the paragraph, and proceeds to compliment himself on his fitness for the enterprises of high politics. "Dante, Ariosto, and Milton," he remembers, "were no less successful as politicians than as poets." As for himself: "The Congress of Verona has enabled Europe and France to judge of my capacities."

No doubt it has; and we will speak of the Congress of Verona presently. There is more of society, however, than of politics in the chapter of the *Mémoires* under review; and not the least interesting section of it is the correspondence with the Duchess of Cumberland, afterwards Queen of Hanover.

One would have to guess a good deal to make a consecutive story out of them. Probably there are some supplementary documents which would complete the story still buried in some archives somewhere. All that one can say with the evidence available is that the letters are too affectionate and too frequent to be accounted for by any ordinary friendship. For a time, while Chateaubriand was absent from his post, the Duchess wrote to him every day, assuring him that she went every day to look up at the windows of his

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house, and that she prayed for him. She also tried to attach him to her service as the tutor of her son, and to take him to England with her. "What a continual romance my life has been!" is his comment on that—so that, perhaps, and indeed probably, her name would have to be included in a full list of those to whom Chateaubriand "lent" himself. But no details are known, and the story has no sequel; and, in fact, whatever note the *Mémoires* strike, it is clear enough from other sources that at this date Chateaubriand's political ambitions were more interesting to him than any romance.

There had already been a beginning, in 1821, of sporadic revolts against the oppressions of the Holy Alliance. Its members had their hands full, and held Conference after Conference to reconsider their position as the police of Europe, and decide who should put down this, that, or the other popular uprising. Such risings occurred in Naples, Piedmont, and Spain. Such Congresses were held at Aix-la-Chapelle, at Laibach, at Troppau, and at Verona. Chateaubriand, while at Berlin, wanted to be sent with the King of Prussia to Laibach; but France had already three representatives there, so that was not to be. He was kept in the Prussian capital, and sulked, pressing his policy in his dispatches, and nursing his personal ambition with the help of Madame de Duras.

His policy, broadly speaking, was to support the programme of the Holy Alliance, but, while supporting it, to exploit it in the interest of French prestige. The tendency of the time was for France and England, as the two Liberal Powers, gradually to have less and

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less to do with Austrian, Russian and Prussian machinations, and to leave the discontented subjects of other sovereigns to work out their own salvation if they could. England, in fact, had already made overtures to France in that sense. France had not yet received them favourably, but might be induced to do so. Chateaubriand opposed that programme. Every republic, in his view, was a source of possible danger to every monarchy. He took that tone even towards the republics set up by the revolted Spanish colonies in America ; and he actually wrote in a dispatch that "if ever the New World is wholly republican, the monarchies of the Old World are doomed to perish." It followed that popular uprisings everywhere must by all means be suppressed ; and Chateaubriand's dominating idea was that France should play a prominent part in their suppression. That was the road, he considered, to the recovery of French prestige.

The pursuit of this policy abroad, however, implied intrigues at home. It was the policy of the right, rather than of the left or centre ; and the ministry of the moment was a ministry of the centre leaning on the right, represented by Villèle and Corbière in the Cabinet, by the Comte d'Artois in Court circles, and by Chateaubriand himself in the diplomatic service. It was a question of pushing and pushing until the centre yielded and Chateaubriand got his chance of demonstrating that he was indeed as great a statesman as "Dante, Milton, and Ariosto"—a belief in which, he assures Madame de Duras, he was encouraged by the Berlin princesses, who were all acquainted with his writings.



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"No one here," he wrote to her, "is dense enough to suppose that because I have written books which people like to read I am unfit for the conduct of affairs. This ridiculous prejudice—or perhaps I should say this lack of good faith—only exists in France."

So the pushing proceeded steadily; Madame de Duras writing Chateaubriand many letters to warn him not to be precipitate, and not to offer his resignation prematurely in a huff. At last the crisis occurred, and the Cabinet had to be reconstructed. Chateaubriand and his friends presented their ultimatum. Either they must have three seats in the Cabinet, or they would resign their offices and join the opposition. The Comte d'Artois, at the same time, withdrew his promise of support. "He has broken his word of honour," said the Duc de Richelieu to Pasquier; and he resigned, having no choice but to do so, and was succeeded by Villèle.

Chateaubriand had hoped for the Foreign Office; but it was given to Montmorency instead. That was the harder because Mathieu de Montmorency was his rival in the affections of Madame de Récamier—a branch of the story awaiting our attention. Meanwhile, however, he was consoled with the office of Ambassador to the Court of Saint James's; and then of course—

"My appointment revived my dormant recollections, and Charlotte returned to my thoughts."

That was in December 1821.

## CHAPTER XXII

In London—A visit from Charlotte Ives—Subsequent relations with Charlotte—Correspondence with Madame Récamier—and with Madame de Duras—The Verona Conference—Chateaubriand Foreign Minister—His disgrace and dismissal—His vows of vengeance—His return to journalism.

CHARLOTTE was now Mrs. Sutton,<sup>1</sup> the widow of an admiral. She came to London to call on the "magnificent Ambassador," asking, "My lord, do you remember me?" and, of course, Chateaubriand protested that to say "My lord" to him was "cruel." And, of course, they talked of old times, asking—Do you remember this—and that? And then Mrs. Sutton introduced her sons, and asked whether, for the sake of those old times, the Ambassador would speak for them to Canning and Castlereagh, and so help them to appointments in the service of the East India Company; and, of course, the Ambassador would, and did.

Then they returned to their reminiscences, and Mrs. Sutton handed Chateaubriand a packet of papers which he had left behind him on the night of that precipitate departure from Bungay, for which he was now forgiven; and he asked her whether she found him altered. Not in the least, she said—he had not even

<sup>1</sup> He writes "Lady Sutton," but the title is a vain invention of his own. In a later passage in his *Mémoires* in which he makes an incidental reference to her he calls her correctly Mrs. Sutton.

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aged ; and he, in writing of her, returns the compliment in language of poetical sublimity. " Her beauty bore the imprint of the divine hand of the Creator ;" and also : " Of the years which had passed over her head only those of the spring had left their traces." Whereupon M. de Marcellus comments—

" A somewhat exaggerated piece of gallantry. I myself, shortly after this interview, saw Lady Sutton and her four-and-forty years. She still retained, no doubt, as some Englishwomen do at her age, handsome features, and had a good complexion, though she was fat. But it was no longer the spring with her. The summer was nearly over, and the autumn was beginning."

Alas ! Alas !

For perhaps, if we read between the lines, we may find confirmation of the testimony of M. de Marcellus in Chateaubriand's own declamatory farewell to his recollections—

" First love of my youth, you and your charms flee from me. I have just seen Charlotte again—but after an interval of how many years ! Sweet ray of light from the past, pale pink of the twilight on the edge of night, lingering long after the sun has set."

Once more, alas ! alas !

For those who had once been lovers were to meet yet again, and to discover that, on Chateaubriand's side at all events, the last lingering traces of the old sentiment had altogether disappeared. Nor was that

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all. Chateaubriand, in telling the story in his *Mémoires*, was to prevaricate, suppress the true explanation of his coldness, and suggest a false one.

Charlotte, he tells us, came to Paris when he was Foreign Minister, and called on him at the Foreign Office. She found him "preoccupied with a war on which the fate of the French Monarchy depended." Consequently there was "something wanting" in the voice once so tenderly sympathetic, and Charlotte wrote a letter "complaining of the chilliness of her reception." Whereupon Chateaubriand protests that "if it were true that there had been any real ground for her complaints, then I would throw into the fire everything that I have written about my first sojourn on the other side of the Channel."

Perhaps ; but the passage is one of those in which Chateaubriand writes, as has been said, "like a child crying over the toys which it has broken." It is perfectly true that Charlotte, at the date referred to, wrote him letters first of pained remonstrance, and then of dignified farewell, telling him that she knew she must not presume, and that she hoped he would be happy. The letters have been printed.<sup>1</sup> It may be argued, too, that Charlotte had no title to complain of Chateaubriand's coldness because she had established no claim to his affections. But it is very far from true that Chateaubriand was so harassed by the cares of office as to be deaf to the voice of sentiment. He was in love at the time—more passionately in love than he had ever been before. "Glory itself," he was then writing—on Foreign Office notepaper—"cannot

<sup>1</sup> In *Les Annales Romantiques*.



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for one single instant distract me from my love ;” and it was this new passion—the story of which shall be told in its proper place—and not any excessive absorption in the cares of State, which now made him indifferent and unresponsive to the sentimental memories which Charlotte’s call evoked.

Even in London, however, Chateaubriand had only toyed with sentiment. At the time when he and Charlotte were reminding each other of what had been and speculating as to what might have been, he was in constant and affectionate correspondence with at least three other women : Mesdames de Custine, de Duras, and Récamier ; and his chief thought was not of any of them, but of his unsatisfied ambitions and of the best means of bringing them to fruition.

An Embassy, though it was that of London, was not the goal of his desires. He felt, as he had felt at Berlin, that he was wasted and shelved in such a post. He wanted to direct, and not merely to help to execute, the foreign policy of France. He was jealous of Mathieu de Montmorency, whom he regarded, not unjustly, as his intellectual inferior—jealous of him not only as his rival in the affections of Madame Récamier, but also as his successful competitor for Cabinet office. He wanted to be—he had made up his mind to be—Foreign Minister in Mathieu de Montmorency’s place. As a stepping stone to that honour he wanted to be sent, instead of Mathieu de Montmorency, to the coming Congress of Verona—the Congress at which the Powers were to consider the desirability of armed interference with the revolutionary movement which had broken out in Spain.

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His letters at the period are full of appeals to women to pull wires. He begged Madame Récamier to coax Mathieu de Montmorency and Madame de Duras to cajole Villèle. The latter lady represented to the Prime Minister that Chateaubriand would at least be "somebody for the kings to talk to," and reported that the argument had appeared to impress him. Her efforts, moreover, were favoured by the trend of circumstances. Villèle and the King did not want a war, whereas Mathieu de Montmorency did; they were only moderately clerical, whereas he was regarded as a "Jesuite de robe courte." Consequently, though they could not dispense with his services without offending the *ultras*, they were afraid to allow him a free hand; and the upshot of the matter was that Chateaubriand was sent to Verona with him to check his bellicose tendencies, and allowed to remain as the chief French representative after his colleague had been recalled to Paris to report.

He was quite in his element there, with kings in abundance to talk to, and the most acute diplomatists of the day to pit his wits against. He met the Emperors of Austria and Russia, the Kings of Prussia and Sardinia, and many minor Italian potentates; he also met Metternich, Esterhazy, Nesselrode, Lieven, Pozzo di Borgo, Bernstorff, Humboldt, and the Duke of Wellington. He was entertained by comedians and interviewed by journalists. He attended horse races, and looked on at displays of fireworks. He was able to flatter himself that he had made a great impression; and he did so flatter himself, without any false modesty, when he afterwards sat down to write the history of the Verona Conference in two

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volumes,<sup>1</sup> congratulating himself, in particular, on his success in conciliating the Emperor Alexander.

“The Emperor of Russia,” he wrote, “had been warned against me. He had been told that, if once he saw me, I should exercise a fascination over him which he would find it very difficult to resist.”

“M. de Montmorency,” he added, “when he came to take his leave of the Emperor, implored him not to be so frightened by the dignity of my presence.”

“My indifference to princes,” he went on, “is so great that I did not even suspect the coldness of character of him whom all my colleagues were respectfully beseeching to allow the light of his countenance to shine on them.”

But he concluded—

“Alexander became my friend in so far as princes have bowels of affection and in so far as friendship is possible between men of such widely different rank and station.”

Socially, therefore, he triumphed; and diplomatically he got his way, though his way, as it turned out, was by no means that of Villèle and Louis XVIII.

Nominally there were several questions before the Conference; but one question overshadowed all the others: What was Europe to do in view of the fact

<sup>1</sup> Originally in four volumes, but reduced to two by the excision of indiscretions.

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that Ferdinand of Spain, the most abominable of the Bourbons, had been dethroned by the Cortes and was practically a prisoner in his palace?

Three lines of policy were possible. There was the policy of non-interference, favoured by England, and also, though perhaps less strongly, by Villèle. There was the policy of collective interference by the combined forces of the Holy Alliance, favoured by Austria, Russia, and Mathieu de Montmorency. Finally, there was the policy of separate interference by France, favoured by Chateaubriand. He cared for the Holy Alliance as little as he cared for popular liberty, and he cared for popular liberty as little as he cared for the Holy Alliance; but he recognized, and grasped at, the opportunity of conducting a safe and easy war which should redound to the glory of French arms and his own statesmanship. Napoleon had failed in Spain; but he would triumph there; and he succeeded in manœuvring his country into the war and himself into the Foreign Office to conduct it. His motives leap to the eyes when one reads the paragraph consecrated to it in the *Mémoires*—

“ My Spanish war, the one great political event of my life, was a grand and glorious enterprise. The Legitimacy was to fight its first battle under the white flag and to fire its first cannon shots after those of the Empire which will sound in the ears of our most remote posterity. To march through Spain at a stride, and to succeed on the very soil on which the armies of a great conqueror had only known reverses—to accomplish in six months what he had failed to accomplish in seven years: who would ever have



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believed in the possibility of this miracle? Yet I achieved it, though I had before me a France that did not love the Bourbons, and the hostility of two great foreign ministers, Prince Metternich and Mr. Canning."

It was a vainglorious boast, but not altogether untrue. Chateaubriand must at least be given the credit of having seen—what a good many of his contemporaries failed to see—that the conditions in Spain made interference easy, and that the invasion would amount to no more than a military promenade. On the other side of the balance, however, has to be set the fact that he brought France to the verge of a fresh war with England, and that Canning successfully defied him to interfere in Portugal and effectually extinguished his further projects of conquest by suggesting the Monroe doctrine and recognizing the independence of the Spanish American colonies. The record on the whole is bad ; and though the Duchesse d'Angoulême welcomed his demonstration that "after all it is possible to deliver an unhappy king," Villèle and Louis were very angry with him for exceeding his instructions in order to gratify his vanity.

His eyes were, for a brief space, blinded by his glory. He saw visions and dreamed dreams, and defended dreaming as statesmanship. "To govern," he wrote, "is to foresee, and to foresee is to dream." "Kings, princes, and ministers," he went on, "are dreamers no less than the poet." He dreamed of negotiating the reunion of the Eastern and Western Churches as "a worthy epilogue of *Le Génie du Christianisme*," and he drew the practical conclusion

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that "Villèle must henceforward leave me full control of his policy." But, at the very hour of his indulgence in these dreams, Villèle was planning and plotting to get rid of him.

Villèle, indeed, though he had used Chateaubriand, and exploited him, had never quite believed in him or fully trusted him. He had pooh-poohed his contributions to the *Conservateur* with the remark that "the best phrase-makers are not always the best statesmen"; and he preferred safe men to brilliant men as his coadjutors. It was against his own better judgment that he had sent Chateaubriand to Verona, and Chateaubriand had abused his position and jockeyed him. He was resolved to be avenged, and a difference of opinion upon some matter of internal policy gave him his chance. He and the King put their heads together behind Chateaubriand's back, and a brutal rebuff was arranged. The story is told in the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*, and Madame de Boigne confirms it, with the addition of some piquant details—

"There had been no open dissension," Madame de Boigne writes, "between him and his colleagues, when, one Sunday, he presented himself at Monsieur's door in order to pay his court to him. The usher told him that he could not be allowed to enter. M. de Chateaubriand thought little of that. He was late, and assumed that the door had been closed and that Monsieur had already gone to join the King. He made haste down the stairs to take his place in the Cabinet Council.

"As he passed the first door, he observed some hesitation in the manner of the ushers and the royal

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body-guards. Finally the officer in command approached him and spoke with respectful regret—

“ ‘ M. le Vicomte,’ he said, ‘ we have received orders not to admit you.’ ”

“ He had not recovered from his astonishment when his friend, M. de Vitrolles, said to him—

“ ‘ You have not come here straight from your own house, I suppose ? ’ ”

“ ‘ No, I left home about an hour ago.’ ”

“ ‘ Then you have missed a letter which is there waiting for you . ’ ”

“ Chateaubriand hurried back, and found the letter, and tore it open. It ran as follows—

“ ‘ MONSIEUR LE VICOMTE,

“ ‘ I obey the orders of the King in transmitting to Your Excellency a decree which His Majesty has just issued :

“ ‘ “ The Comte de Villèle, President of our ministerial council, is entrusted *ad interim* with the portfolio of foreign affairs in place of the Vicomte de Chateaubriand.” ’ ”

No more—and no less—than that. The sun of Chateaubriand’s political glory had set even more suddenly than it had risen. Madame de Boigne continues—

“ M. de Chateaubriand signed the receipts for the letter with his own hand, and sent for six hackney carriages. He flung his belongings into them higgledy-piggledy, and before the clock had struck the next

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hour he had written to M. de Villèle to say that the King's orders had been executed, and that the Foreign Office, as well as the portfolio, was at the disposition of the President of the Council."

So that phase ended, on Whit Sunday, 1824 ; and Chateaubriand was once more in opposition, and more convinced than ever that the function of an Opposition was to oppose, and doing his best to justify Louis XVIII's verdict that he seemed determined to make it impossible to govern either with him or without him. He would crush Villèle, he announced, with his pen ; and he began, in the *Journal des Débats*, a series of philippics which did not cease until the Villèle Cabinet was overthrown in 1828. They are admirable as journalism, though they took four years to produce their effect ; but it would be wearisome to reproduce them here. Strange as it may seem, we have Chateaubriand's word for it that neither the battle which he now had to fight nor the glory which he had been driven to relinquish were the interests which most deeply touched his heart.

" It often happens," he writes in his account of the Verona Conference, " that one is more disturbed by a secret weakness of one's own than by the destinies of empires. In the depths of one's heart one feels that trifles are the really serious things. Could the spectator but perceive the puerilities which flash across the brain of the man of genius at the hour of his greatest achievement, he would be overwhelmed with amazement. And yet, when all is said and done, he would be wrong. Nothing is important absolutely and



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in itself ; and a kingdom is of no more account and value than a pleasure."

A remarkable passage truly, intended to be enigmatical, and to convey the vague suggestion that Chateaubriand, the statesman of fifty-five, on whose glorious doings the eyes of all Europe were enviously fixed, was still, in his heart of hearts, René ! And so, no doubt, he was, at times, up to a point, and in a sense. But the confession, as we shall see, has its particular as well as its general bearing ; and, in order to understand its exact significance, we must turn back and recover the story of Chateaubriand's private life and passions during the years in which he climbed to power and fell from it.





*Madame Récamier.*

## CHAPTER XXIII

Madame Récamier—Her salon and her admirers—Ampère, Balanche, and Mathieu de Montmorency—Montmorency jealous of Chateaubriand—Madame de Duras jealous of Madame Récamier—She writes Chateaubriand letters of complaint, warning, and remonstrance—Chateaubriand's devotion to Madame Récamier—Its limitations—"A little interlude of jealousy."

WHEN, where, and in what circumstances Chateaubriand and Madame Récamier first met cannot be ascertained. He wrote several versions of the story for his *Mémoires*; but when he read them to her, she always insisted on his altering them. It may be true, as he once wrote, that he discovered her languishing on a sofa in Madame de Staël's drawing-room and wondered "whether it was the image of Modesty or of Love that I beheld." It is not the less likely to be true because the statement is one of those which Madame Récamier suppressed; but one does not search confidently for the truth in doctored documents, and, as the matter is of no great importance, we may leave the mystery unsolved.

Their friendship began, at any rate, in or about 1818, when Chateaubriand was fifty and Madame Récamier was forty-three, but looked no more than thirty; and they encountered as two celebrities equally famous for their "successes" in the field of love. Each of them had, so to say, a "list" on which it seemed



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essential to self-respect and in accordance with the fitness of things that the name of the other should be inscribed. So incense was burnt to Chateaubriand in Madame Récamier's apartment in the Abbaye-aux-Bois ; and Chateaubriand, whom the fragrance of incense always pleased, acquired the habit of assiduity. Every morning he sent Juliette a letter ; and every afternoon at three o'clock he came to call, "with his waist squeezed in," writes Philarète Chasles, "his cane in his hand, his head in the air, and his fingers buried in his waistcoat."

This was the period at which Benjamin Constant, having loved Madame Récamier in vain—and yet not more vainly than a good many of the others—had succeeded in curing himself of his unprofitable passion, and gone away vowing that he would do his best to "make Charlotte<sup>1</sup> happy" ; but his departure had by no means left Madame Récamier without admirers sighing at her feet. There were at least three other supplicants for her favour at the time, though only one of them counted.

J.-J. Ampère<sup>2</sup> did not count, for he was only a boy of one-and-twenty ; and though Madame Récamier encouraged him as she encouraged all her tributaries, he dared not presume very much and was easily kept in his place. Similarly with "the worthy Ballanche," whom we have met before. He had given up his business in Lyons in order to live in Paris and be near Madame Récamier ; but she only made him useful, employing him to run errands, to write letters,

<sup>1</sup> His wife.

<sup>2</sup> Ampère in 1833 was made Professor of French Literature at the College de France, and in 1848 was elected to the Academy.

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and to open the door to her visitors when her footman was out. The one suitor who did count was Mathieu de Montmorency, the Minister for Foreign Affairs ; and him Chateaubriand supplanted, by degrees if not at once.

Mathieu de Montmorency belonged to one of the oldest families in France. He was an *ultra*, both in politics and in religion, and inclined to mysticism. At Vienna, on his way to Verona, he broke an appointment with Metternich in order to call upon a nun ; and it has been written of him that "he flattered himself that he was religious whereas in truth he was only devout." His piety, at any rate, was not so extreme as to prevent him from making love to married women, though his intimates called him "Saint Matthew." He bought Chateaubriand's house at La Vallée-aux-Loups, as has already been mentioned, and Madame Récamier stayed there alone with him—an adventure which brought her a delightful letter from the Duchesse de Broglie.<sup>1</sup> "You must confess," Madame de Broglie wrote, "that when the time comes for including Mathieu's biography in the Lives of the Saints, this *tête-à-tête* with the most beautiful and widely admired woman of his age will furnish material for a very amusing chapter."

No doubt it would, if the particulars were ascertainable ; but they are not. All that we really know is that, at first, Chateaubriand was jealous of Mathieu de Montmorency, and that, afterwards, Mathieu de Montmorency was jealous of Chateaubriand ; and this jealousy explains a good deal. It explains—or at all events it is a partial explanation of—the ease with which Chateaubriand obtained important diplomatic

<sup>1</sup> Albertine de Staël.

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appointments, and the reluctance with which he accepted them. All Mathieu's influence was at his disposal for this purpose, for Mathieu wanted him out of the way. He, on his part, regarded himself as "in exile" alike in Berlin and in London because he wanted to sit in Madame Récamier's salon, and knew that Mathieu had the field practically to himself during his absence. The pains of exile might be mitigated by the devotion of the Duchess of Cumberland in one capital and the coquetries of Mrs. Sutton in the other ; but Paris remained the centre of his sentimental interests.

Mathieu de Montmorency's jealousy, however, was not the only jealousy which the new relation had involved. Madame de Duras was jealous too. Her intimacy with Chateaubriand, it is true, was only "Platonic," and she had no proof that her rival's intimacy with him was of any more ardent character ; but that fact made little, if any, difference to her feelings. She was plain, and she knew it and deplored it ; and the plain are always ready to be jealous of the beautiful. She saw Chateaubriand ceasing to call daily on her in order that he might call daily on Madame Récamier ; she felt herself neglected, and was hurt. She continued to work for him and push his fortunes in the political *coulisses* with a loyalty that never relaxed, and he, on his part, continued to lean with his full weight upon her influence ; but the tone of their letters changed by imperceptible degrees. We find Madame de Duras complaining, and Chateaubriand resenting her complaints, and even going so far, on more than one occasion, as to threaten to "close this correspondence."

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The correspondence was long, and it would be possible to fill a good many pages with extracts which would do honour to Madame de Duras' heart. She was faithful to Chateaubriand through good report and evil, in spite of deceptions and exposures, and in spite of contumely and neglect. No woman, it may fairly be said, ever did more to help a politician on his way, or got less thanks for helping him. She spoke for him in the Cabinet, as we have seen, and she gave him good advice which it was always profitable to him to take. Her services were so valuable that he could not afford to drive her away, but had always to be thanking her for something ; and yet, when we come to read her letters, we find a refrain of lamentation running through them.

Already, when he is at Berlin, we find her protesting that he does not write often enough : " I have been kept waiting for your letters, and have been upset, and have hardly the heart to write to you " ; and then, a little later, laying her finger on the cause of her trouble, she says—

" If you only did me an injustice for the sake of the mistress whose name I can guess, I would say, Well and good. All honour to your fidelity ! But they tell me that your real mistress is the lady of the Abbaye-aux-Bois, and that that is the address at which your letters are delivered. Ah, my dear brother, this is very *young* conduct for an old diplomatist. Will the turn of friendship never come ? And do you really think that any one else looks after your interests better than I do ? "



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"How can you believe all this nonsense about the Abbaye-aux-Bois?" was Chateaubriand's answer to that; but Madame de Duras knew very well that what she had heard was not nonsense and had very good reasons for believing it. Yet she forgave, and when Chateaubriand was leaving for London, wrote—

"Do you know what friendship means? Do you know what it is to spend a long morning without seeing the friend to whom you are accustomed to open your heart and talk about all the little miseries of which life is made up? *I have had all my clocks stopped in order that I may no longer hear the striking of the hours at which you will not come.*"

And then, on the anniversary of the execution of Chateaubriand's cousin Armand, she visited the grave at Grenelle on his behalf, and picked a primrose there, and sent it to him. "I picked just such another," she wrote, "the very first time I went there with you. That was fourteen years ago, and I have it still." And then, in another letter—

"Yesterday I went out for a walk, and it suddenly flashed upon me that I had to be back at one o'clock. Then I remembered that it was to see you that I wanted to return. I cannot tell you how sad the thought was and how melancholy it made me all day long."

There follow letters of warning and remonstrance on Chateaubriand's besetting vice of extravagance—

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"I recommend to your attention the virtue of economy. Do not imitate the cobbler in the play and imagine that you possess all the money that God has made because you happen to have £20,000. You will soon come to an end of it at that rate. So behave like a man of character, and never get behindhand with your bills. You will say I am tyrannical. So I am in these matters, for I know it wouldn't take you long to run up debts to the tune of £6,000—that is to say 150,000 of our poor francs. Remember how embarrassed you used to be, and for how long!"

She had earned the right to lecture him like that by helping him, though she sometimes vowed that she had liked him better in the old days when his blue coat was threadbare and his boots were down at heel. She playfully reminded him of those days in a letter in which she asked him to make her a present of Horace Walpole's *Memoirs*: "In the days when we were neither of us very well off, I lent you a little money. Now that you are richer than I am, I beg you to make me a present of this book." And so forth; the correspondence ranging over a wide field of subjects, but with two refrains continually recurring in it. Chateaubriand's refrain, petulantly repeated as often as he is provoked, is: "I shall give up writing to you." Madame de Duras' refrain is that Chateaubriand is ungrateful and unkind, and that it cuts her to the heart to be forsaken for the hostess of the Abbaye-aux-Bois—

"You possess a thousand good qualities; but you are a man, and affectations and mincing ways are sure

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to have more effect on you than has the simple, sincere, and solid attachment of my heart."

And again more bitterly—

"No, my dear brother, no one can deprive you of my friendship. Such a friendship is like a noble attribute of the soul. No one but yourself can take it away from you. When I realize my own sincerity and devotion to you, and remember that, for fifteen years, I have thought more of you than of myself, and have, over and over again, set your interests before my own—and that quite naturally and without any consciousness of superior merit—and when I perceive that you will not make even the slightest sacrifice for me, I am indignant with myself for my folly. . . . Such a friendship as mine does not consent to be divided, but has all the drawbacks of love ; and, though I know that it has none of the advantages of love, we have both passed the age at which that really matters. The knowledge that you talk to others just as you talk to me, and associate them with your feelings and your affairs, is intolerable to me, and always will be. Enough, therefore, of such thoughts. They hurt me ; and I do not want that bitterness to be added to the pain which your absence causes me."

Let that suffice. We need no further proofs. All the love and all the loyalty of Madame de Duras stands revealed in these extracts from her letters. She had no illusions. No other woman ever read Chateaubriand's heart as clearly as she read it. No other woman had so much to forgive, or forgave it so

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completely ; there was no other woman to whom he owed more or accorded less. She bore his rebuffs, and made light of them, and continued to love him, and to work and intrigue for him, making, as it were, a career of the promotion of his interests, until the day when his dramatic expulsion from the Cabinet made it impossible for her to serve him any longer. Then having lived only for him for fifteen years, she dropped out of his life, and went to Nice, and died ; while he, on his part, went on his way untroubled, resolved to lay his life, as he puts it, "like a carpet of flowers," at Madame Récamier's feet.

"As I approach my end," he writes in the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*, "I feel that everything that has been dear to me has been so in relation to Madame Récamier, and that she has been the secret source of all my affections. My recollections of every period of my life—my dreams as well as my experiences—have become confused and commingled into a composite idea of charms and tender pains of which she is the visible form. She is the ruler of my sentiments and the supreme authority of heaven has introduced happiness, order and peace into my round of duties."

It is a faithful picture if we isolate it, and regard it merely as a picture of the later days. Whatever there was of serene dignity, of continuity and finality, in Chateaubriand's sentimental life is to be found concentrated in this last friendship or *liaison*—for one hesitates as to the word—of thirty years' duration. He and Madame Récamier, after many and various experiments with life, many false starts, and many



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regrettable mistakes, were at last to solve its hardest problem, and grow old together with increasing dignity in mutual confidence and undisturbed affection.

But not yet—and not for a good many years to come. Chateaubriand could not think of beginning to grow old at fifty, and could not easily bring himself to confess that he had grown old at sixty; and the common legend that, after he had once met Madame Récamier, his life belonged to her, and hers to him, is by no means in accordance with the facts. Juliette at forty-three—and for some time after she was forty-three—was still a coquette unwilling to allow any one admirer undisputed pre-eminence in her heart. It may be that, from the first—or almost from the first—she preferred Chateaubriand to Mathieu de Montmorency; but it was a long time before she altogether ceased to play the two men off against each other. If Mathieu was jealous, Chateaubriand was jealous too; and it is very doubtful whether his jealousy entirely disappeared before the day when Mathieu died suddenly while at his devotions in the church of Saint Thomas-Aquinas on Good Friday, 1826. And meanwhile he had himself given very good grounds for jealousy.

“There was at that time (in 1823),” writes Sainte-Beuve, “a little interlude of jealousy on account of a certain very pretty and clever woman, a Madame de C——, who was the recipient of a great deal of attention at the Foreign Office.”

He says no more, and he only drops his mysterious hint in a footnote; but no doubt he knew a good deal more than he said. At any rate the clue which he

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furnishes has been followed up by an anonymous writer in *Les Annales Romantiques*. Letters have been discovered. Madame de C—— has been identified; and the story—or a great deal of it—can be reconstructed.

## CHAPTER XXIV

Who was "Madame de C——?"—Chateaubriand's passionate letters to her—He addresses her in verse—Madame Récamier leaves Paris in dudgeon—Ampère and Ballanche try to console her—They accompany her to Italy.

THE writer in *Les Annales Romantiques* goes no further than to say that he could identify Madame de C—— if he chose. A contributor to the *Figaro*, reviewing his article, puts a dot on the i, saying that C was indeed the initial letter of her name, and that she was the wife of a future Marshal of France,<sup>1</sup> at that date a Colonel of Hussars, of whom Larousse writes in his Great Dictionary that "his manner towards women recalled the gallantry of a by-gone epoch." If that criticism, and all that it implies be just, then there can be no doubt that his wife punished him amply, though without his knowledge; for of all the

<sup>1</sup> The writer in the *Figaro* discovers his clue in the following passage in the recently published *Memoirs of Baron de Frénilly*—

"In addition to the direction of Foreign Affairs, he had assumed the direction of the private affairs of Madame Boni de Castellane, as whose admirer he figured openly in the days before my old friend Molé succeeded him in her favours."

The Baron goes on to tell a story to the effect that Chateaubriand advised Madame de Castellane to invest a large sum of money in the loan issued by the Spanish Cortes, and subsequently intrigued, purely in her interest, to prevent King Ferdinand from repudiating the loan after his restoration to power. This, according to the Baron, was the true reason of his precipitate dismissal from his office.

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women whom Chateaubriand loved Madame de C—— is the only one whom he addressed in the intimate style of “thee and thou.” He made love to the others—even to Pauline de Beaumont—in the grand manner, almost as if writing for publication. In the case of Madame de C—— he was swept away by passion, and evidently wrote for no other eyes than hers—

“My angel, my life—I know not what else to call you—I love you with all the madness of my earliest years. For you I am once again the brother of Amélie. The whole of the past is forgotten since you let me kneel at your feet.

“Come with me to the seaside. Come with me where you will, so that it is somewhere far away from the world.

“At last I have realized this dream of happiness which I have so long pursued. It is you whom I have always adored even before I knew you. . . .

“. . . To-morrow at two! . . .

“. . . May Heaven never deprive me of my happiness! Yours till the end of my life.”

“Never have I seen you looking so beautiful as you did yesterday evening.

“I would have given my life to hold you in my arms.

“Tell me. Was it your love for me that adorned you? Was it my burning passion for you that made you so seductive in my eyes?

“You saw—I could not stop looking at you—I could not stop kissing the golden chain you wore.



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When you left me, I should have liked to throw myself at your feet, and worship you as a goddess.

“Ah, if you only loved me one half as well as I love you!

“My poor head is turned, and it is for you to cure the evil which you have caused.

“At eight o'clock then! I shall await you with a beating heart.”

That in September 1823, when Chateaubriand was at the summit of his political renown, conducting from Paris the war which he had organized at Verona, and cradling royalist France in the belief that it was recovering under his inspiration the lost military glories of the Napoleonic era. The letters were written in the intervals between the writing of dispatches, and on the same official gilt-edged notepaper. Nor was it letters only that were thus written. With the second letter there was enclosed a poem, also on official gilt-edged notepaper—the only love poem, so far as is known, that Chateaubriand ever wrote—

“Par quelle illusion ai-je pu te séduire?

M'aurais-tu point, dans mon dernier soleil,  
Cherché l'astre de feu qui sur moi semblait luire  
Quand d'Atala je pégnis le réveil?

Je n'ai point le talent de Virgile et du Tasse ;  
Mais quand le Ciel m'eût fait cet heureux don,  
Le talent ne rend point ce que le temps efface :  
La gloire, hélas ! ne rajeunit qu'un nom.

L'amant de Velléda, le frère d'Amélie,  
Mes fils ingrats m'ont-ils ravi ta foi ?  
Ton admiration me blesse et m'humilie.  
Le croirais-tu ? je suis jaloux de moi.

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Dédaigne, ô ma beauté, cette gloire trompeuse.  
Il n'est qu'un bien : c'est le tendre plaisir.  
Quelle immortalité vaut une nuit heureuse ?  
Pour tes baisers je vendrais l'avenir."

With more, ten stanzas in all, written on the morning after a ball at the Foreign Office. It was there, in the Foreign Office reception rooms, in the midst of princes, and princesses, and ambassadors, that René, a Foreign Minister indifferent, as he flattered himself, to all pomps and vanities and splendours, desired only to prostrate himself on the polished floor and worship a woman as a goddess.

Colonel de C——, though present at the entertainment, may have been too busily occupied with his own endeavours to "recall the gallantry of a by-gone epoch" to notice anything; but some of the other guests noticed a good deal. The King himself remarked upon Chateaubriand's "levity." The Prime Minister gave orders to his secret police to watch developments and report. Society winked and whispered. Madame Récamier observed that Chateaubriand ceased to be punctual at his "hour" at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, and had many friends who were only too eager to inform her of the reason why. The whole matter is threshed out, albeit only in dark and enigmatic allusions, in her correspondence with Ballanche, with J.-J. Ampère, with Paul David, with Mathieu de Montmorency, and even with Chateaubriand himself. Paris had become intolerable to her. She would go to Rome; and, as it was inappropriate for the Queen of Beauty to travel anywhere without a court, Ampère and Ballanche would go with her.

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The ostensible pretext was her niece's health. Her niece, who afterwards became her biographer, says that the real reason was "an alteration in the character of M. de Chateaubriand's pure affection," and a temporary abandonment on his part of his attitude of "respectful reserve." But this statement only shows that Mlle. Cyvoct was too young to be told the truth. The letters prove to demonstration that Madame Récamier fled from Chateaubriand, not because her virtue was threatened by the increasing ardour of his advances, but because her vanity was hurt by the diminution of his assiduities. All her friends, even those who are most ambitious of taking his vacant place, protest that he is treating her badly; and her own letters, both to them and to him, are full of complaints of a grievance which she never specifies, but of which any one who knows the facts can easily divine the nature.

She got so far, on one occasion, as to address him stiffly as "Monsieur"; and there is one remarkable letter written from Rome to Paul David, in which her reasons for delaying her return to Paris are thus given—

"If I were to come back now, I should only return to the troubles which drove me away. If M. de Chateaubriand were unkind to me, I should be terribly upset. If he were kind, I should be face to face with an embarrassment which I have made up my mind to avoid for the future. Here I find a distraction in the arts and a support in religion which will protect me from all the storms of the heart. It is very sad for me to be obliged to stay away from my friends for

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another ten months ; but it is better to make the sacrifice, and I really feel that it is necessary. Believe me, my dear Paul, I shall never forget the benefit which I have derived from your friendship, even in these strange circumstances."

That letter is the most luminous of all the commentaries. It shows that virtue, in Madame Récamier's case, was not incompatible with something very nearly akin to passion. It shows that, while she felt herself aggrieved, she was too deeply attached to Chateaubriand to force a quarrel with him, but preferred to wait till her rival's tyranny was overpast and he returned to her. It also shows that, though she sought consolation in the triumphs of coquetry, she failed to find it.

Ballanche and Ampère—especially Ampère the young and ardent—were as devoted in their attentions as she would suffer them to be. Ampère was her constant escort, her guide, her *cavalier servente*, and even her poet. "Ah! venez," he wrote—

" Ah ! venez et souffrez que mon bras vous soutienne,  
Que parfois sur mon cœur je presse votre bras ;  
Laissez, laissez tomber votre main dans la mienne :  
Venez, sur ces hauteurs je veux guider vos pas."

And no doubt Madame Récamier did, from time to time, let her hand lie in the hand of J.-J. Ampère, and even permit him to press her hand against his heart. She went through life doing such things, and meaning little by them ; but now, as is quite evident, she meant less by them than ever. Her heart was in Paris, whence Chateaubriand's letters came to her.



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They did not come quite so often as of old—he protested that he was too busy to write regularly—but still they came; and it must have been very puzzling for Madame Récamier, knowing what she knew, to decide what to make of them.

For Chateaubriand would not quarrel with Madame Récamier and would not let her quarrel with him. His heart was capacious, and he saw no reason why passion should interfere with friendship. Perhaps he realized that he would want the friendship always, and remembered that his passions usually languished after a little while. So he continued to write affectionately, and sometimes even reproachfully, to Madame Récamier, even at the height of his passion for Madame de C——. “Your monsieur,” he told her, “froze my heart. You know very well that I have done nothing to deserve it;” and it often happened that he went so far as to write to her and to Madame de C—— on the same day.

On October 25, for instance, Madame de C——, about to depart on a journey, received this passionate communication—

“Go your way, then—you are the delight and happiness of my life—but only to meet me again, and intoxicate me with your love, and make me the most glorious and most enviable of men.

“In a few days’ time I shall be at your feet, and shall press your heart to mine. We shall be alone, and I shall be able to cover you with my kisses, and breathe your breath, and make my life a part of yours.”

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Simultaneously Chateaubriand received a letter from Madame Récamier, announcing her intention of leaving France, and concluding tearfully: "I am saying good-bye to all the joys of the earth." And to her his answer was—

"No, no. You are not saying good-bye to all the joys of the earth. You are going away, but you will soon be back again, and you will find me just as I have always been, and always shall be, in my feelings for you. You must not accuse me of what is really your own act. . . . I will come and see you after the Cabinet Council. I love you with all my soul, and neither your obstinacy nor your injustice shall prevent me from doing so."

And then, just three days later, in reply to another letter which one must suppose to have been conciliatory—

*"So you see you were mistaken. There was no reason whatever for this journey. If you go, you will not stay away long, and when you return, you will find me just as you left me—that is to say, very tenderly and very sincerely attached to you. . . . I never tire of my affections, and, however long I were to go on living, my last day would still be filled and brightened by your image."*

It was true; but the truth related to the future rather than the present. Madame Récamier, apparently, understood that, and did not change her

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plans. She set out for Italy on November 2, closely followed by "the worthy Ballanche" and the ardent J.-J. Ampère; and it was also on November 2 that Chateaubriand set out to keep a remote and secret appointment with Madame de C——.

## CHAPTER XXV

Chateaubriand's letters to Madame de C—— His secret trip with her to the seaside under the pretence of visiting Madame de Custine—Madame de Custine's expectations and disappointment—The break-down of the carriage—The "shrewd conjectures" of the Prefect—Scandal and gossip—Madame Hamelin—Madame de C——'s jealousy—Her gradual estrangement from Chateaubriand.

WHILE assuring Madame Récamier, with more truth than he knew or can have guessed, that his affection for her was unaltered and would last for ever, Chateaubriand was continuing to write almost daily to Madame de C——. Fearing the vigilant curiosity of his old friends Villèle and Corbière, he dared not trust the post, but employed his confidential secretary Hyacinthe Pilorge to deliver his letters by hand; and Madame de C——, on her part, moved frequently from place to place in order that Hyacinthe might not invite remark by knocking too often at the same door. It was a shrewd precaution; but Madame Récamier, as we know, was not deceived, nor were her friends.

"What can I say to you?" the ardent Ampère wrote to her. "You are suffering. It is *another* who causes you to suffer. Ah! how can I console you?" And meanwhile Chateaubriand's one and only thought was to find a means of getting away secretly to the seaside with Madame de C——. His political duties



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obstructed him and he was tempted to throw them to the winds ; but Madame de C—— would not accept that scandalous sacrifice. So, on October 5, we find him writing her a long letter, the more remarkable because it vehemently contradicts what he parades, over and over again, in his *Mémoires*, as one of the settled sentiments of his life.

The thought of parentage, he tells us repeatedly in his writings, was repugnant to him. “Next to the misfortune of being born I can think of no disaster greater than that of giving birth to a son. I have never desired thus to survive myself.” But Madame de C—— had inspired the desire which he had never felt before, and was never to feel again—

“I am sending Hyacinthe with this letter. So I am to lose this night which I was to have passed in your arms. But at least I can write to you without reticence and tell you that I would give the whole world for one of your caresses—for the chance of pressing you to my beating heart, and uniting myself to you in those long kisses which make me breathe your life and impart my life to you. You would have given me a son ; you would have given me my only child. Instead of that, I have to wait here for a great public function in which I shall find no happiness whatever. For what is the world without you ? You have robbed me even of my pleasure in the success of my war.”

So he must be patient ; but presently—

“I shall have more liberty, and I shall seek you

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wherever you may be. If you love me, will you not meet me at Fécamp, by the sea, or anywhere else that you like? Oh, yes, you must give me my compensation. . . . I am writing to you after having written to every king and every minister in Europe. My hand is tired, but my heart is not. It loves you with all the ardour and all the passion of youth. A million kisses for your hands, your lips, your hair."

And then follows a postscript, added at midnight—

"I was full of joy in the thought that I should be able to come to you when the King sent to say that he wished to see me to-morrow at midday. Believe me, only your *orders* have power to keep me here. The thought that I must not ruin a career that belongs to you—you at whose feet I must lay my glory in order that I may win your love—is the one thing that prevents me from sacrificing all my prospects and taking you away with me to the ends of the earth. . . . But oh, how I long to see you! How I long to hold you in my arms and make sure that you love me still. Grant me the night that you promised me, and that you owe me, and for the sake of which I would gladly give my life."

Not only the royal audience but the annual *fête* of the Infirmerie Marie-Thérèse stood between Chateaubriand and his amours. He and Madame de Chateaubriand were the founders and benefactors of that charitable institution; and he must stay to take his part in the rejoicings, at which princes and princesses had promised to be present. He did so,

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and heard a sermon preached by Abbé de Bonnevie—the same Abbé de Bonnevie who, long since, at Rome, had administered the consolations of religion to his earlier love, Pauline de Beaumont. The preacher, we read in the contemporary chronicles, “addressed a flattering compliment to the minister who had celebrated the Genius of Christianity”; but the champion of the faith had, in church as at the Foreign Office ball, no eyes for any one but Madame de C——, and no thought for anything except her promise to meet him by the sea.

“You saw,” he wrote, “how I loved you to-day. You shall see how I will love you when we are far away from the crowd. I send you all my kisses. Remember that you are my *mistress*, and that I adore you. I kiss your feet and your hair.”

That was on October 24. On October 25 Madame de C—— started for Dieppe. On November 2—the very day of Madame Récamier’s departure for Italy—Chateaubriand followed her, and joined her *en route*, according to their preconcerted programme, meaning that they should complete the journey together in his own carriage.

A pretext was needed in order to throw dust in the eyes of the inquisitive; and Chateaubriand found one by procuring and accepting an invitation to visit Delphine de Custine at Fervacques. The Queen of Roses was an elderly lady now. Her pink cheeks were withered and her golden hair had turned to a snowy white. Nobody was likely to be jealous of her—Madame Récamier as little as Madame de

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Chateaubriand, and Madame de Chateaubriand as little as Madame Récamier—no scandal-monger could plausibly say that either of them ought to be jealous ; and—what was most important—the road to Fervacques was also the road to Dieppe. So he set out, after writing, almost with a clear conscience, to Madame Récamier : “ I shall be back on Thursday, and I shall find you gone ; but that is your own doing.”

He never arrived, however, either at his ostensible or at his real destination. There was an accident, and his carriage broke down on the way. It has been suggested that Villèle's police spies contrived the accident by tampering with the vehicle in the hope of surprising the Foreign Minister *in flagranti delicto*. They did not quite succeed in doing that ; but they at least discovered enough to set Paris talking, and to embarrass Chateaubriand with the necessity of offering explanations. It was on this occasion, and therefore presumably in connection with this occurrence, that Madame Récamier “froze his heart” by addressing him as “Monsieur” ; and Madame de Custine was hardly less offended, as we see from his reply to her.

What are these stories, he wants to know, that she has got hold of ? There is no sense in them. He is no longer of an age for *that sort of thing*. He really and truly was on his way to Fervacques when circumstances beyond his control compelled him to return to Paris. How absurd to make a fuss about that ! In spite of her “injustices,” and in spite of the tongues of slanderers, he still hopes to come to Fervacques to see her. Most likely something will happen to prevent him, but still—he “cherishes the delightful day-



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dream." And then, having written that, he sat down to write once more to Madame de C—— :

"I have received your long letter. I thank you for it. I have carried it all day next my heart. . . . Tell me when you will be in Paris, and when I may come and kiss your beautiful feet. . . . Yours. Yours."

And also—

"I have just got your letter of the 10th. You took all precautions, as I did myself; but I don't like this Prefect who is so shrewd in his conjectures."

In view of which one cannot wonder that Mrs. Sutton, whose call at the Foreign Office took place at about this period, found the Foreign Minister absent-minded and preoccupied; he had quite enough to think about without thinking of her. Nor can one even feel surprised to learn that, at this date, Madame Récamier's hair suddenly turned white, and that she still persisted in remaining in Italy. Chateaubriand, she told Paul David, wrote her "affectionate letters," and complained of her absence, and implored her to return; but she added—

"One never knows where one stands with a person so lacking in truthfulness, and I am absolutely determined never again to involve myself in all these agitating embarrassments. Time is necessary to enable me to alter the terms of my relations with him, and the prolongation of my stay here will help me to effect the change."

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No doubt; and no doubt, too, Madame Récamier was wiser than the worthy Ballanche, who, having returned to Paris, and having seen Chateaubriand, exhorted her to "bring him back to moral sentiments." The time for moral sentiments would come when Chateaubriand tired of Madame de C——, but not before; and that relaxation of his ardour was very nearly due. Already, in March 1824, we find the correspondence striking a new note—

"I cannot let you go to sleep with such a horrid thought in your mind. I assure you that all that you have heard about Madame H—— is false. You may depend upon it that I shall never see her again."

Another—probably to be identified with Madame Hamelin—the Madame Hamelin whose enthusiastic appreciation of *Le Génie du Christianisme* was quoted in an earlier chapter! We know from the Diary of the Maréchal de Castellane that "while Chateaubriand was minister, he used to write to Madame Hamelin daily about political affairs"; and, in a letter which he wrote to Madame Hamelin twenty years later, Chateaubriand reminded her of this old friendship, concluding: "Love me always as you did in the days when you used to come to see me at the Foreign Office." So that perhaps—but it is impossible to tell. All that is certain is that the end was near, and that this was the beginning of the end. There is one more real love letter, with the exclamation: "What a storm last night, and with what longings it inspired me! If only we had been by the sea together!" But that is

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all. In the letters which follow we find the passion cooling.

Possibly Madame Hamelin was in part responsible; but a more plausible explanation may be found in Chateaubriand's sudden and ignominious ejection from his office, early in June 1824. Rebuffs of that sort always revolutionized his view of the realities, and threw him into a fighting mood, which left little room for tender sentiments. This was the worst rebuff that he had yet experienced, and it may be that Madame de C—— and her unfortunate investment had had something to do with it. His pride was wounded, and he was terribly in earnest. He was busy arranging with Bertin for his great campaign in the columns of the *Journal des Débats* against Villèle; and he was first going to Neuchatel, whither Madame de Chateaubriand had already repaired for the benefit of her health, to recuperate his energies and think out his plans. It is significant that, at this date, the "thee-and-thou" disappear from the letters to Madame de C——:

"Wednesday, June 28, 1824.

"Madame de Chateaubriand has just left me.

"I will dine with you this evening. I shall be with you at five.

"We will make our arrangements for our travels.

"Yours always."

That is all; and nothing definite is known of any quarrel, or of any specific reason why the "arrangements for our travels" broke down. Presumably there was no reason, except that the passion had burnt

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itself out, and that Chateaubriand's political fiasco had placed an extinguisher on the failing flame. At all events, Chateaubriand's biographer has no further need to mention Madame de C——. The ships had passed in the night, though they had done rather more than speak in passing ; and Chateaubriand was once more free to spread his life as a carpet of flowers at Madame Récamier's feet.

We shall see him, after a further glance at his political career, resuming that task, and pursuing it—though not without certain interruptions.



## CHAPTER XXVI

Chateaubriand at Neuchatel—Death of Charles X—Chateaubriand returns to Paris and publishes a pamphlet—Fall of Villèle's Cabinet—Martignac succeeds him—Madame Récamier returns to Paris and forgives Chateaubriand—His appointment as Ambassador at Rome—Life at the embassy depicted by M. d'Haussonville—References to a last love in a suppressed passage of the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*.

AT Neuchatel, according to the *Mémoires*, Chateaubriand lived in "a cabin by the lake side." He lived, in fact, at 14 Faubourg du Crêt, in a house which is still standing, and looks comfortable if not luxurious—as one would expect, seeing that Madame de Chateaubriand chose it. Chateaubriand, however, had just vacated a mansion, and a cabin was the obvious opposite of a mansion; so that it was the obvious thing, if not to live in a cabin, at least to talk of one, and to remember the case of an earlier *émigré*, who had pined in the same town until he committed suicide by throwing himself out of window.

His one distraction, Chateaubriand continues, was to watch the proceedings of a half-starved black cat, which supported itself by catching fish in a bucket of lake water; and that is a recreation of which a man of active intellect tires quickly. Balzac, who, nine years later, came to lodge in the same house, was more agreeably occupied; for it was there that he made the

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acquaintance of his mysterious "Etrangère."<sup>1</sup> Chateaubriand had, for the moment, no such sentimental resource; and Neuchatel paid little attention to his presence. There was no "Mylord Maréchal" to make much of him, as Keith had made much of Rousseau; and Madame de Charrière, who had made much of his political ally, Benjamin Constant, was dead. He read her *Lettres Neuchâteloises*, but was nevertheless bored, and felt relieved when the news of the King's death gave him an excuse for cutting short his stay and returning to Paris.

He hurried back and wrote his pamphlet: *Le roi est mort; vive le roi!* He believed that it was because his pamphlet urged the course that Charles X was crowned at Rheims. "Not," he explains, "that I had the faintest personal belief in the value of the ceremony; but as the Legitimacy was in a bad way, it seemed necessary to invoke all devices, for what they might be worth, for its support." He attended the ceremony, at which Béranger mocked so bitterly.<sup>2</sup> "All my duties," he tells us, "were then fulfilled. I left Rheims, and could say, like Jeanne d'Arc, 'My mission is completed.'"

Not that he had meant his mission to terminate so summarily, but that he could find no means of continuing it. The pamphlet had been a bid for office; but the bid had not been accepted. Charles X retained Villèle, but did not recall Chateaubriand. He said that he "regretted" him, and he spoke to him politely on the coronation day; but he made no further

<sup>1</sup> Mme. de Hanska.

<sup>2</sup> Béranger was sent to prison for deriding the coronation in a well-known song.

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advances. Probably he could not have made any without quarrelling with Villèle, with whom it was not politic to quarrel; and so Chateaubriand renewed his Press campaign. It was in those circumstances, he writes, that his political importance attained its culminating point.

“I had dominated Europe by means of my war with Spain; but I had had a violent opposition to contend against in France. After my fall I became the acknowledged leader of French opinion. Even those who declared that I had committed an unpardonable fault in taking up my pen were obliged to recognize that I had built myself an empire more powerful than the first. Young France was on my side to a man, and has never since deserted me. In many of the industries all the workmen were at my command, and crowds surrounded me whenever I showed myself in the streets. For what reason did I acquire this popularity? It was because I had read the true mind of France. I had commenced the combat with a single journal at my service, and I had become the master of the entire Press. My audacity was the result of my indifference. As I did not care whether I won or lost, I marched to success, unembarrassed by the fear of failure.”

He exaggerates—but not extravagantly. Sainte-Beuve ranks his newspaper articles with the best of his writings; certainly they were not the least effective. If he swam with the tide, at any rate he swam strongly. The “true mind of France” at this time was Liberal, whereas the true mind of the King and the Court was

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clerical and reactionary. Chateaubriand had been cradled into Liberalism by disappointed hopes ; and his destiny was to come in on the top of the Liberal wave. He satisfied such good Liberals as Lafayette, who sent him a wreath of laurel with his compliments, and Sebastiani, who told him that he combined "the elevation of Bossuet with the profundity of Montesquieu," and Benjamin Constant, who offered him "the homage of a sincere admiration and a profound esteem."

The gradual result of the struggle was to make both the royal family and the ministers unpopular. The Dauphine and the Duchesse de Berry were insulted on their way to a review of the National Guard. The King was greeted with cries of "À bas les Jésuites," and did not mend matters by saying that he proposed to receive "homage, not lessons," from his subjects. A crowd assembled outside the Ministry of Finance to shout "À bas Villèle." The National Guard was disbanded, and the censorship of the Press was re-established, with the result that barricades had to be stormed. Then Parliament was dissolved, and the new elections placed Villèle in a minority. A new Ministry was formed under Martignac, and once more something had to be done for Chateaubriand.

He was offered first the Ministry of Public Instruction and then that of Marine ; but he declined both appointments. He wanted to return to the Foreign Office ; but his colleagues would not have him there, fearing his wilful ways and his habit of preferring his own policy to that of the Cabinet. Ultimately he was persuaded to accept the Embassy at Rome in succession to Mathieu de Montmorency's brother, the Duc



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de Laval, who was promoted to Vienna. "Perhaps," he comments, "it was useful to my country to get me out of the way ;" but he makes haste to add : " This time, at any rate, my banishment was pleasing to me."

Meanwhile, however, Chateaubriand had made his peace with Madame Récamier—and made it so effectually that his rivals, divided between the desire to see her happy and to make her so, were once more jealous.

She came back to the Abbaye-aux-Bois while he was at Rheims, attending the coronation. As soon as he returned to Paris he came to call on her, just as if nothing had happened and he were unaware of any estrangement. Her friends professed to fear that the interview would be stormy ; but it was not. " No word of reproach or explanation was uttered," says Madame Lenormant.<sup>1</sup> Chateaubriand simply took his place in the salon as of old, and as of right ; and the other admirers had to give way as before.

Mathieu protested with a sort of gentle petulance. He feared, he wrote, that, when she visited La Vallée-aux-Loups, Madame Récamier thought more of " the former proprietor " than of him. She did ; she could not help it ; and there was no more to be said. All that she could do was to promise to use undue influence to procure Mathieu's election to the Academy—a distinction to which his literary merits assuredly did not entitle him—and persuade Chateaubriand to promote the candidature.

Prince Augustus of Prussia also protested. He had once very nearly persuaded Madame Récamier to

<sup>1</sup> Her niece, whom we have met as Mlle. Cyvoct.

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divorce her husband in order to marry him, so that he felt that he had a right to speak. He sent her a haunch of venison, and ten brace of pheasants, and stated in his covering letter that he had heard that she had undertaken the "conversion" of M. de Chateaubriand, and that he did not approve. There was a certain "novelty," he said, in her evangelical methods which would entitle her to take a unique position among missionaries if she succeeded; but he feared that "celestial happiness" was not the main objective of the sinners who availed themselves of her ministrations. It was true; and Madame Récamier knew it; but she did not care. Her answers, though affectionate, were unsatisfactory. It was Chateaubriand's life, and not another's, that she wished to see "spread as a carpet of flowers," et cetera.

As for the ardent Ampère—the hardest hit of all the suitors—he dropped into poetry and fled. "Ne pleure plus," he wrote—

"Ne pleure plus sur ta jeunesse  
Et sur le coup qui t'a frappé:  
Laisse du bonheur l'inutile promesse,  
Mensonge vain qui t'a trompé."

Which means—

"No longer weep for your distress,  
Nor for your youth which dies,—  
Nor for your promised happiness,  
Built on deceit and lies."

And having written that, and some further stanzas to the same effect, he went away to Bonn, and studied hard, and gradually became a learned man—which no doubt was the best thing that could have happened to

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him ; and Chateaubriand reigned thenceforward in undisputed supremacy at the Abbaye-aux-Bois until the time of his departure for Italy in July 1828.

Beyond the fact that he reigned in undisputed supremacy, there really is nothing to relate which would not be related more appropriately in Madame Récamier's biography than in his. The statement that he wrote a prayer for Madame Récamier's use on the occasion of the death of his rival Mathieu, though current, does not seem to be true. The prayer commonly quoted in this connection appears really to have been composed at the time of the death of Pauline de Beaumont. For the rest, there is nothing to be said except that Chateaubriand was the central figure and perennial attraction of a salon which Madame Récamier never allowed to become "political" and which Lamartine described as "an Academy holding its sessions in a convent."

He was not bored ; he was much too busy and too angry. He was not in love—or not passionately so—for the same reason. It was difficult for him, now that he was verging on the sixties, to engage in too many simultaneous activities ; and he once more, in the years of opposition, found homage more restful than intrigue. Passing from the newspaper office to the drawing-room, he read the company some extracts from the early portions of his *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* ; and though Marcellus has written that "M. de Chateaubriand never used to weep in public," there were those of his listeners who declared that he often "wiped away a tear" when thus evoking the memories of the days that were no more. And so the time passed until Villèle was overthrown, and he obtained

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not only his Embassy, but also some arrears of salary amounting to about £6,000, and set out for Rome, accompanied not only by Madame de Chateaubriand, but also by a young *attaché*—M. d'Haussonville—who had it in his mind to take notes, and ultimately to print them.

“ I had hardly set out,” Chateaubriand writes, “ in Madame de Chateaubriand’s company, than my natural melancholy rejoined me on the road ;” and M. d’Haussonville gives us his reasons for supposing that the presence of Madame de Chateaubriand was not unconnected with his gloom. When Chateaubriand complained of the heat, says the *attaché*, Madame de Chateaubriand made a point of throwing fresh logs of wood on the fire ; and when Chateaubriand complained of the cold, Madame de Chateaubriand always rang for the servants and told them to open the windows. It is a small matter, but eloquent of much. Wandering affections are more likely to be driven further afield than to be recovered by such means ; and so it happened in this case.

The principal political event of the period was the assembling of a Conclave for the election of a new Pope. There was, as at all Conclaves, a good deal of intrigue ; and Chateaubriand flattered himself that he had defeated the machinations of the Jesuits and secured the selection of his own nominee. We find him speaking of “ my Pope ” as proudly as we have found him speaking of “ my war ” ; and it was in order to exploit his success that he presently returned to Paris. That, at all events, was his principal motive, though he had others. His prize, he thought, if he



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pulled the wires, and had them pulled for him properly, might be the Foreign Office. He had miscalculated—but we shall come to that. Meanwhile he had very little to do; and though he had now passed his sixtieth birthday, he did not feel himself too old for gallantry.

M. d'Haussonville pictures him standing for hours before the mirror, with his elbow on the mantelpiece, and, speculating as to his thoughts, decides that he was thinking only of himself. He adds that he hardly ever heard the name of Madame Récamier mentioned at the Embassy, and that that surprised him. M. d'Haussonville, however, was only nineteen; and it was scarcely to be expected that his Ambassador would take him into his confidence as to his self-communings and secret sentiments. Nor is it reasonable to attach importance to the fact that the Ambassador sometimes instructed the *attaché* to deliver bouquets on his behalf at Italian ladies' doors. A bouquet as a rule means less than a single rose or a tiny bunch of forget-me-nots. The Comtesse del Drago, who received the bouquets—or most of them—is of very little account in Chateaubriand's life; and, if the Ambassador did not discuss Madame Récamier with his *attaché*, at least he wrote to her regularly three times a week.

She had charge alike of his business interests and of his political fortunes. Many of the letters relate to the proposed production of his poetical play *Moïse*. Supported by the advice of his political friends, she persuaded him to withdraw it; and he consented to do so, though he absolutely refused to refund the sum which he had received in advance

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of royalties. He appealed to her to procure his recall to France—and, of course, to Cabinet office. He implored her, in other moods, to come to Rome and stay with him; addressing her as his “beautiful angel,” and doing everything in his power, so far as letter-writing went, to wipe out her recollection of past infidelities. His letters fascinated her so much that she regularly copied out the most affectionate passages, and forwarded the copies to the Duc de Laval—his late rival Mathieu’s brother—at Vienna. It really seemed as if, at last, all was for the best in the best of all possible romances. And yet, as it happened——

For Chateaubriand was not even yet, as George Sand says of Chopin, “exclusive in his affections.” When Madame de Chateaubriand replied to his complaints of draughts by throwing the windows open, he felt the need of more immediate and intimate consolation than his correspondence with Madame Récamier could afford; and he found it, though Madame Récamier never knew.

There exists in manuscript a discarded fragment of the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*—discarded presumably for fear lest Madame Récamier’s feelings should be hurt by it—belonging to this period of his life, and showing us pretty clearly on what thoughts Chateaubriand’s mind was dwelling when his *attaché* observed him gazing into the mirror, and imagined that he was only thinking of himself. It is too long to be quoted in full; but the concluding lines may be given——

“Now that I have grown old in the world, without

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losing any of my dreams, my mad passions, and my vague moods of melancholy ; now that I am still in quest of that which is nowhere to be found ; now that there is added to my misfortunes the disenchantment of experience, the loneliness of longing, the weariness of the heart, and the shameful burden of the years—do I not present the devils of Hell with the picture of a punishment not yet conceived of in the region of eternal pains? . . .

“Charming flower which I refuse to pluck, it is to you that I address the last incantations of my melancholy. You will not hear them till I am dead and my life has gone to join the rubbish heap of broken lyres.”

Which means, of course, that Chateaubriand realized at last, in the sixties, that old age was coming, and so uttered his swan song—a farewell to the dreams and passions and ideals of youth. But it also means that, in spite of, and independently of, his renewed devotion to Madame Récamier, whose hair was white, he had allowed himself to fall in love again. It means that two “inconnues” had entered into his life—two “inconnues” and also Hortense Allart de Méritens.







*Marquise de V...*

## CHAPTER XXVII

An inconnue—Who was “Madame de V——?”—Chateaubriand’s correspondence with her—Their meeting and its unfortunate result—Chateaubriand discovers that his inamorata is fifty years of age—A second inconnue—The allusion to her in the *Mémoires*.

THE anonymous author of *Un dernier amour de René* introduces the first of the “inconnues” mysteriously as Madame la Marquise de V——; but he produces the veiled lady’s portrait as his frontispiece and adds information which makes it easy to pierce the secret of her identity. Her husband, he tells us, was appointed in 1827 to the office of Inspecteur des Douanes at Toulouse; and a reference to the Almanach Royal for 1828 shows that a M. de Vichit then occupied that position. We can recover the name, therefore, though, when recovered, it means nothing; and there is nothing to be said about M. de Vichit except that he was the Inspector of the Customs whose wife loved Chateaubriand.

She loved him for his books, and made his acquaintance by writing to him. Her first letter dates as far back as 1816. Among some old papers, she said, she had found a manuscript which she would like to show him, as she believed that its contents concerned some member of his family. He replied that he would give himself the pleasure of calling on her;

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but, frightened and abashed by her own temerity, she sent him the manuscript and fled from Paris. The manuscript did not, in fact, concern Chateaubriand or any of his relatives ; so he merely thanked the stranger for her politeness and forgot the incident.

Eleven years later the stranger wrote again. She was then living alone in a country house near Viviers, in the South of France. She and Chateaubriand had a common friend in M. Hyde de Neuville—the same M. Hyde de Neuville who had met Chateaubriand when he was travelling with Natalie de Noailles-Mouchy in Spain : that was her excuse for addressing him. She had read in the papers, she said, that overwork had made him ill, and that he had grounds for anxiety as to the health of Madame de Chateaubriand. Would he think her presumptuous if she asked him to instruct his secretary to write to her once a fortnight and inform her how he and Madame de Chateaubriand were getting on? He replied, in his own hand, saying that he could not think of assigning that honour to a secretary, and assuring her that he and Madame de Chateaubriand were both “a little better.”

That was towards the end of November 1827, when the Villèle ministry was tottering to its fall ; and it was the beginning of a long interchange of letters, seventy-five of which have been printed. Chateaubriand, according to his custom, destroyed Madame de Vichit's letters ; but Madame de Vichit kept copies of them, and pinned them to Chateaubriand's answers, and added occasional explanatory notes in the margin, so that there is no difficulty in following the romantic interlude. At first, of course, she addressed him as

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"M. le Vicomte" and subscribed herself "Marquise de Vichit," but not for long. Already in the third letter of the series we find her calling him her "cherished star," and signing herself "Marie."

They are delightful letters to read, for they contain almost everything that one would expect, and end in a revelation and a surprise. It is agreed between the parties that they love each other though they have never met, and that some day they will meet—and that then, perhaps—who knows? And meanwhile there are delightful little jealousies, and characteristic little coquetries—not on one side only. Madame de Vichit makes Chateaubriand jealous—it is one charmingly feminine touch among many—by assuring him that there really is no reason for him to be so. There is a certain Chevalier de Berbis—but why trouble about him? He has all the virtues—but he is ugly, uglier even than M. de Villèle, who, but for M. de Berbis, would be the ugliest man in France.

The bait takes—or seems to do so. "I am not reassured," Chateaubriand writes, "by your portrait of your admirer. These ugly lovers, like Du Guesclin, often make conquests." And then again, in a later letter, apropos of some other jealousy: "No, Marie. It is I who am going to arrange your life for you. Patience for a little while, and all the difficulties shall be smoothed away." And meanwhile, and pending an interview, there is coquetry between the correspondents on the subject of their respective ages.

Chateaubriand insists that he is old, and he is quite sure that his correspondent must be young. "Your handwriting," he says, "is that of a young woman. Mine has grown old like myself." And then again:



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"The wind of adversity has no more spared my moustache than it spared that of Henri IV, and the tale of my years is written on my brow." That was his way—his "little device of vanity"—as he confesses in his *Mémoires*. He liked his "inconnues" to be agreeably surprised when they saw him, and say to themselves: "Ah, he is not so very old after all!" "My little trick," he adds, "has sometimes succeeded;" and we can see it succeeding with Marie. "You had told me so much about your age and your white hair that . . . But you are younger than I thought, and you look younger than you are, so that my letters are improper."

Only, if Chateaubriand was younger than Marie thought, Marie, on her part, was older than Chateaubriand supposed. She was, in fact, very, very near to her fiftieth birthday; but recognizing Chateaubriand's mistake, she could not bring herself to remove it. Perhaps he should have read between the lines and guessed when she begged him to love her for the sake of her letters, just as she loved him for the sake of his books. Perhaps, too, he should have found a hint in some of her excuses for avoiding interviews. But he did not. For eighteen months he was devoured by the curiosity which her evasiveness provoked; so that when at last he did meet her in the summer of 1829—but one must not anticipate.

Except for this one excusable deception, Marie's heart, as her letters reveal it to us, was singularly frank and candid. It is impossible to read those letters without feeling that one knows her through and through. She was very silly in her infatuation, but very feminine, and very charming. Her proceedings

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may not have been quite fair to M. de Vichit ; but we know so little about M. de Vichit that we cannot say much about that. He had left her to live alone in the country instead of taking her to Toulouse ; and such things are not to be done with impunity in a romantic age. Marie, in spite of her years, was a romantic woman. She wanted some one to love and to live for, and Chateaubriand encouraged her ; and very likely she thought of him, not as a mortal with human weaknesses, but as an Olympian god.

One cannot say how far she thought of going, or was prepared to go. Her letters contain a good many appeals to "the proprieties," which one must not assume to have been insincere simply because they crop up rather quaintly. The inference is rather that Marie would on no account tempt, though she might perhaps be tempted, and that, if she did not feel capable of resisting a *siège en règle*, she did not expect one, seeing that Chateaubriand was great and good. She was very sorry for him—sorry when his political ambitions were disappointed, and still sorrier when he spoke of his gloom and melancholy ; and she would like to help him, and believed that she could do so. She would like, she said, to be his "guardian angel." As for the rest—well probably she felt content to leave the rest to him.

We can see the infatuation even in her prose style. It is an obvious imitation of his prose style, full of his gorgeous imagery, and echoing his measured, melancholy cadences. There are even moments when it rises almost to his level ; and it is not marred, but is made more charming, by the touches of feminine solicitude which appear in the midst of the polished,

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flowing phrases. How spiteful are Chateaubriand's enemies! How important it is that he should be careful of his health—especially at Rome, where there are such dreadful fevers! Is not office bad for him? Is there not a fear that he may overwork himself? Or does he need the distraction to divert him from too melancholy meditations?

And very soon, of course, there are confidences. Marie addresses Chateaubriand as "the elect of my heart," and tells him all about herself and her husband. Married at the age of thirteen, she has not been happy, though no blame is to be attached to M. de V——. He is an "excellent" man; she values his "esteem and friendship." But he suffers from "spleen and its most frightful consequences." She is unable to regard him as "a guide and a support." She "cherishes" and "respects" him, but she does not "confide" in him. In fact she does not even live with him, and has not done so for a long time. He is serving his country to the best of his ability in the Toulouse Customs House, and she has retired to the country in order to be near her mother, who is an invalid—and she has "embraced resignation as a friend," and learnt how to "suffer without making others sad." Such is "the friend whom God has sent" to the "dear master."

The "dear master," as a matter of course, expresses the desire to meet his friend. An infirm mother and a distant husband are no insurmountable obstacles. Chateaubriand may well have imagined that the infirmity of the one and the absence of the other had been mentioned for no other purpose than to show that Marie was accessible. He begins to talk, therefore, of seeking her out in her solitude, though

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he cannot commit himself to a promise : “ My life is so fettered that my plans are only dreams. I hope to realize them, but I have lost the confidence of youth which transforms chimeras into realities.” He will come some day—she may be sure of that ; but it may be many months before he is able to do so. In the meanwhile, why should not Marie come to him? “ Come to me ! Come to me ! ” is the refrain of letter after letter.

Of course Marie wants to come ; equally, of course, she is afraid. She knows she has been bold ; but at the bottom of her heart she is timid. She has defied the proprieties ; but she has not ceased to think of them. She has been unconventional ; but she wants to be conventional too. It seems clear that she dreads, and wishes to put off, the day when Chateaubriand will discover that she is not a girl, but a middle-aged woman. So she makes excuses, and finds it impossible to be in Paris except at dates when she knows that he will be absent. And then, in the midst of her hesitations, he tells her that there is a prospect of his being nominated to the Embassy at Rome, and asks : “ How would you like the idea of travelling in Italy if fortune should thrust me into this pleasant place of exile ? ” Whereupon the voice of the proprieties speaks, and indeed almost screams—

“ You ask me if I would like to travel in Italy in case you went there ? My dear master !!! If I were a bird I would fly after you to Italy, or even to Norway, with the same delight. If I were a young man, I would become your secretary or your page, and follow you without one backward look. If I were the



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relative or the friend of Madame de Chateaubriand, I would leave all to attend you. I would devote my heart and my strength to the task of nursing her night and day, in order to preserve her life for you. But, being what I am, how can I, without impropriety, travel alone in a foreign country? ”

But Marie does not quite mean what she says—or changes her mind when she has said it, and when she perceives that the prospect of receiving a visit from Chateaubriand in her secluded valley is, after all, remote and doubtful. “My life,” he tells her, “is so uncertain that, though I am always making plans, I never know whether I shall be able to realize them. It is my passionate desire to visit a Pyrenean watering-place. But shall I be able to? And, if I do, shall I be able to visit you in your mountains either on my way there or on my way back?” So all is uncertainty; but he adds, italicizing his words: “*Come to me!* The shelter is not a very sure one, but a ruin may sometimes afford a place of refuge.” And then Marie begins to melt, albeit with due regard—or at all events with some regard—for Madame de Chateaubriand’s claims and feelings—

“The heart of Madame de Chateaubriand is yours. Tell her that you have a last surviving sister! Beg her to love me, and she will do so! Then I shall be able to accompany you both to Rome. I shall only be with you when your hearts require me. Our life will be full of gentle emotion and charm. You will both, made happy by one another, find comfort in my pure and faithful friendship. . . . That is the inspiration

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that has been vouchsafed to me in answer to my prayers."

But that is not at all what Chateaubriand means. He does not see why Madame de Chateaubriand should be mixed up in the matter. He knows Madame de Chateaubriand better than Marie knows her. So he replies to Madame de V—— in a phrase copied textually from one of his letters to Madame de C——, telling her that he has been writing all day, and that his hand is tired, but that his heart is not, and then continuing—

"Ah, if only my life were my own to dispose of! What a happiness it would be to have you with us! But I am helpless in the matter, and I dare not even take the risk of making a proposal which would appear extraordinary. A wife's many virtues are not always and necessarily productive of peace, charm, and happiness."

The next letters argue the question out. Marie is quite sure that the dear master has misjudged Madame de Chateaubriand, and that she and Madame de Chateaubriand would get on very well together: "Your fortunate companion would first love me only for your sake, but she would soon love me for my own sake too." Her presence would be "a relief to Madame de Chateaubriand from the irksome constraints of her position." Chateaubriand protests that it would be nothing of the kind; and Marie returns to the charge—

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"I was assuming," she writes, "that you had found love in marriage, calm in your studies, and happiness in your virtues. Now that I know that this is not so, all is trouble and confusion in my heart and mind. The whole moral order of the universe seems to me to have been upset by this incomprehensible misunderstanding."

And she continues, reverting to her project—

"For propriety's sake, I did not want it to be said that I was going with you. But I thought that we might meet on the way, and that my carriage might follow yours as far as Rome, and that there we might separate, and that, in my quality of temporary resident in the city, I might call on Madame de Chateaubriand occasionally, or frequently, according to the degree of the intimacy which might establish itself between us."

And then, a day or two later, she sketches the programme in more detail—

"I thought you might tell Madame de Chateaubriand that a woman who had shown you some proofs of regard, several years ago, had inspired you with a benevolent interest, which her letters had caused to deepen into friendship; and that, as this woman was coming to Rome, you wished to seize the occasion to show her some hospitality, and would like Madame de Chateaubriand to see to this. Hence an introduction and an exchange of calls. If Madame de Chateaubriand had loved you as I thought she did, you would inevitably have been the link between us, and she

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would have accorded me her friendship on account of my affection for you—just as she now inspires my own most sympathetic interest, in spite of the fact that I only know her by name. . . . Surely that was not such a very extravagant idea!”

But Chateaubriand still knew better, though he did not like to say so too bluntly. He must not, he says, “enter into details” about Madame de Chateaubriand’s “disposition and temper”; but, of course, Marie can come to Rome if she likes to take the risk: “You could make Madame de Chateaubriand’s acquaintance there, and remain if you still thought the situation possible after you had seen her.” But really it is not worth while. It is not likely that he will be long in Rome, and he will probably be able to pay Marie a visit on the way back.

It was not a very encouraging letter; and the relaxation of Chateaubriand’s ardour seems to date from it. Marie was so hurt by it that she left it unanswered for nearly a month—at the end of which time Chateaubriand wrote to inquire whether she was ill, or whether she was tired of corresponding with him. She replied that her silence had been due to “considerations of propriety and delicacy”; and after that, though the correspondence continued for several months longer, it was never glad, confident morning again. “Marie,” Chateaubriand could still write, “is a great charm for my life;” but Marie, nevertheless, found something wanting in his letters. There was, she objected, “a sort of anonymous style about them as if they were addressed to nobody in particular”; and she was wounded because he would neither send



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her his portrait nor give himself the trouble of composing a "form of prayer" for her use.

He was, in fact, as we shall see presently, otherwise, and very fully, engaged; and while she, on her part, remained blindly devoted as ever, his feeling for her was gradually declining into an idle curiosity to see what she was like.

In one of her letters, she asks him, with resigned melancholy, "When men of genius live on earth, are they capable of any tender thought for the mortals devoted to them?" but he only replies to the effect that she will be sorry to hear that the Pope is dead. In another, written from Paris, she tells him that she has been to see his *Infirmier* Marie-Thérèse, and laid her hand upon his writing-desk—"the repository of so much glory and so much gloom"—and has hardly been able to tear herself away. In a third she suggests that he should buy a house that is for sale in her own neighbourhood. Nine acres of land are attached to it. The rooms are lofty and the windows large; the walls are six feet thick; there is a well in the garden, and an avenue of chestnuts. Fifty thousand francs is the price asked, but forty-eight thousand would probably be accepted. The necessary repairs would cost eight or ten thousand francs.

And so forth. Marie goes into the details as minutely as an estate agent; but Chateaubriand is not to be tempted. He wants to see her—that is all, except that he also thinks it well for her peace of mind that she should see him. "If you have any illusions about me," he writes, "they will then evaporate;" and, as she is in Paris and he is due there shortly, a meeting must be arranged. "You

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have seen my little house," he writes, in reply to her letter about the Infirmerie. "Now you must see me;" and he asks for an appointment. She makes one, with a last word about the "proprieties," and a flutter of apprehension. "Never mind about my illusions," she says. "It is for your own illusions that I tremble."

Not without reason. He saw her, and saw that she was fifty; and when he had seen that, all was over between them. He called on her two or three times, at brief intervals, and then he ceased to see her; and then he went off to Cauterets to drink the waters and to forget all about her. But she did not forget. She treasured his letters, bearing no malice, and thinking no evil, but fondly cherishing the memory of the passing kindness of an angel to one of the daughters of men.

Every one should read her letters, for they are full of human nature, and this brief summary has done much less than justice to them; and every one who has read them should then follow Chateaubriand on his pilgrimage to the Pyrenees and mark his next confession of an adventure there.

"I was engaged in composing poetry when, on the banks of the stream, I met a young woman. She rose and came over to me, knowing, from the talk of the village, that I was at Cauterets. It appeared that this unknown lady was an Occitanian, who had been writing to me for the last two years, though I had never seen her. The mysterious stranger introduced herself. *Patuit dea!*

"I used to return the visits of my Naiad of the torrent. One evening, when I was parting from her,

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she insisted upon following me. I had to carry her back to her own apartment in my arms. Never have I felt so ashamed. The idea of inspiring such an attachment at my age seemed to be absolutely ridiculous. I felt as I were being humiliated and mocked at. . . . But I let the fugitive impression of my Clémence Isaure efface itself, and the mountain breezes soon carried the caprice away, and the bold and charming stranger had reason to be grateful to me, for she is now married."

So there was another—and not one other only! In addition to these two mysterious strangers, of whom we know so little, there was also Hortense Allart, afterwards de Méritens, of whom we know a good deal, because she was not ashamed of her irregularities, but so proud of them that she took the world into her confidence.







Hortense Mart de Moritons

## CHAPTER XXVIII

Hortense Allart de Méritens—Her many lovers—Her frank predilection for free love—Her presentation to Chateaubriand in Rome—*Les Enchantements de Prudence*—Identification of Prudence with Hortense—Her account of Chateaubriand's infatuation—They both return to Paris—Fall of Martignac—Polignac Prime Minister—Chateaubriand resigns his embassy.

HORTENSE ALLART, born in 1801, was the first cousin of Delphine Gay.<sup>1</sup> She was attractive, clever, passionate, high-spirited ; and she was left an orphan, absolutely unprovided for. For a little while she was a governess ; but such women do not remain governesses for long. Either they marry, or else they throw their bonnets over the windmill. Hortense threw her bonnet over the windmill, and never regretted it, though she lived to be seventy-seven.

Her lovers were the Portuguese Comte de Sampayo, Chateaubriand, Sir Henry Bulwer, afterwards Lord Dalling, the Italian Jacopo Mazzei, and Sainte-Beuve. Possibly the list is not complete ; but this is not the place in which to try to extend it. The essential fact is that, though most of them treated her badly, she never quarrelled with any of them. The only man with whom she quarrelled was her husband, whom she deserted because of the violence of his temper, and whose wedding ring she threw away in the middle of

<sup>1</sup> Madame de Girardin.

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the high road ; but she always remained the friend of the men of whom she had been the mistress.

She was not only clever, but well-informed, and even erudite. She wrote novels, and also a *History of Florence*, and other learned books—quite good books though a little disjointed, and not, as it happened, successful. Thiers does not seem to have tried to kiss her, as he once tried to kiss George Sand, but he enjoyed her conversation. She corresponded with Bulwer about high politics, and disputed with Sainte-Beuve on points of criticism.

Sainte-Beuve was only her lover for a few days. He was too busy, he said, to follow up his advantages ; he was also, as Hortense had reason to know, too much occupied with Mesdames d'Agoult<sup>1</sup> and d'Arbouville. His intimacy with her was only the "clou d'or" which riveted the chains of friendship, and he considered the chain so strong that a single rivet sufficed. She was disappointed, but she was not offended. Willing to allow others the liberty which she claimed for herself, she contented herself with rallying him on his comparative austerity, and continued to write to him on all subjects under the sun, but chiefly about herself—the varying degrees of attachment which she had felt for her various lovers, and her view of love and the place which should be assigned to it in a well-ordered scheme of life.

Her letters, lately published by M. Léon Séché, are a full and candid revelation. Hortense hides nothing, and excuses nothing ; she has no hypocrisy, no remorse, no scruples. She is quite satisfied that it is proper to pray to God that such love affairs as hers

<sup>1</sup> For a long time the mistress of Liszt.

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may prosper. She declares, when engaged to be married, that marriage should be preceded by "at least two years' intimacy," and that it is tempting Providence to marry without first testing the estate of matrimony by experiment; and after her marriage, but before her separation from her husband, we find her exclaiming with fervour: "Oh, my lovers, my delightful lovers, lovers whom I loved for a day, and lovers whom I loved for a decade; lovers whom I loved in pique, and lovers whom I loved indeed—how charming it is to remember them all, now that I am alone and am ill-treated." And then, in colder blood, philosophizing—

"I think the moralists are wrong. . . . If ever on my way through life I should meet a girl who was at once finely nurtured, of bright intelligence, and vigorous, I would tell her to do as I have done and follow nature nobly. Better to fight one's battle in the midst of passions than to fight the passions themselves. A girl who has a lover, though he be but a poor creature, lives her own life, weeps, enjoys, and yields to a divine law. The girl who resists nature has only torment for her lot. It is a terrible and gloomy state of things. All the machinery is out of gear, and falls to pieces; and it would be much better for her to die."

Such was Hortense, and such was her philosophy—the philosophy of George Sand put frankly and without the sentimental unction. She did not merely fling it out in occasional moods of petulant disappointment, but was always ready to formulate it whenever the opportunity occurred. She did so again apropos of



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Sainte-Beuve's proposition that three lovers were enough for any one. "Don't limit the number," she wrote. "Say only that one should be straightforward, and should keep one's self-respect, and do nothing, whether due to passion or not, which God cannot accept as resulting from the irresistible law which He has imposed."

It is the most frank profession of faith which we meet in the whole history of the Romantic Movement; and it is professed repeatedly and unconditionally. One feels that the woman who professed it was the woman of all others whom it behoved Chateaubriand to meet—not merely for the enlargement of his experience, but also because he was bound to find her an antagonist worthy of his steel. Only, of course, the encounter was not quite fair; for he was over sixty, and she was not yet twenty-eight.

He met her in Rome, where she was staying with her sister, Madame Gabriac, the wife of a French merchant, in the quarter del Quatro Fontane. Madame Hamelin—the same Madame Hamelin of whom, as we have seen, Madame de C—— was jealous—wrote to her advising her to call on him. She at once bought and read *Atala* in order to prepare herself for the ordeal; and then she asked and received permission to present herself at the Embassy. The Ambassador received her "with coquetry," and said that he would like to see her again. He returned her visit, in fact, in the course of the following afternoon, "wearing all his orders," according to M. d'Haussonville, and made his arrangements for other and less ostentatious interviews. The task was one, says M. d'Haussonville, of

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which the junior members of the Embassy would gladly have relieved him ; and that is credible enough. And one can also believe that Chateaubriand was in earnest when he wrote to his friend, Marcellus : " If only Madame de Chateaubriand would go back to Paris, I should be very pleased to spend the summer here."

There is no hint of the story in the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*.<sup>1</sup> Hortense only figures there as a writer whose name is casually mentioned in the midst of a long list of writers. She wrote her own recollections of the interlude, however, and lent the manuscript to Sainte-Beuve, who quoted a long extract from it in an appendix to *Chateaubriand et son Groupe Littéraire*. Indignant critics declared that the " Unpublished Memoirs " from which he professed to be citing were apocryphal, but that was not the case. Long afterwards, in 1872, the entire volume of reminiscences appeared under the title of *Les Enchantements de Madame Prudence de Saman d'Esbatz*.

George Sand knew enough to divine the author's identity. She wrote to her to tell her that she had done so, and that she considered her " a great woman " ; and she reviewed the book for *Le Temps*, expressing " abundant sympathy for this fervent soul," and asking what moralist would dare to cast the first stone at her.

It was Barbey d'Aurévilly, the most truculent of French critics, who cast it. He cast, in fact, not only the first stone, but the second, and the third, and all the stones that he could lay his hand upon. Prudence (which is to say Hortense) is for him " a female

<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Beuve reproaches Chateaubriand for omitting it.

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Rousseau," and also "a member of the old society of France boasting of her love affairs after they are over, as the cowards boast after the battle!" He talks of "pigsties" and of "the companions of Ulysses turned into swine and wallowing at the feet of Circe." In fact, though Hortense was then seventy-two, he showed no mercy to her grey hairs, with the result that her son, Marcus, took the matter up. He challenged Barbey; and when Barbey refused to fight him, he called at the office of the *Constitutionnel* to assault him, and, failing to find him there, assaulted one of the sub-editors instead, with the result that he was cast in damages to the extent of two hundred francs, and sent to prison for a month.

The story is true, however. It bears the stamp of truth, and the correspondence amply corroborates it. Even Barbey did not doubt its truth, but only shrieked that it ought to have been left untold in the interest of a great Catholic reputation. Perhaps it ought, but there it is; and the picture of the Great Catholic Ambassador who had restored religion to France, who had the Pope for his friend, who composed "forms of prayer" for the use of women, and to whom little children were brought to recite his touching words about the "first communion," gains an added touch of humanity from the details which Hortense gives us.

"He had a wonderful way with him," she writes, "for he was very fond of feminine society. He used to call on me with a flower in his button-hole, well-groomed, and fashionably dressed. His smile was charming; his teeth were of a dazzling whiteness; he was frivolous and appeared to be happy. Already his

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newly acquired gaiety was the talk of Rome ; and Italy, which he had at first revisited with a sense of melancholy, had now a fresh attraction for him."

He argued with her about his war, and made her his confidante concerning his political ambitions. He sent her his books, writing : " Both they and I myself are yours to dispose of." Just as he had previously talked of winning glory in order to earn the love first of Natalie de Noailles-Mouchy, and afterwards of Madame de C——, so now he told Hortense that his only object in seeking power was to give her pleasure, and that he hoped to " lay France as a trophy at her feet." And then, when he had made up his mind to return to France and exploit his triumph at the Conclave—

" He came to me and asked for a confession, and a word of hope. I had to speak or else lose him, for he was going away. I saw that matters were moving too fast, but I gave way, leaving reflection until afterwards. I gave him the promise which he asked for, and he was delighted. He demanded *proofs*."

And presumably Hortense gave him proofs, for Chateaubriand speaks of this year as the happiest of his life.

His political machinations, indeed, came to nothing. Charles X did not like him very much, and liked still less the Liberal opinions which he had developed while in opposition, writing for the *Journal des Débats*. Perhaps, he said, he would have Chateaubriand in his Cabinet some day, but he could not have



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him there just yet. Meanwhile he was in the hands of the extreme Catholic party; and so, instead of giving the Foreign Office to Chateaubriand, he gave it to Polignac.

How far Chateaubriand's objections to Polignac, at this stage, were personal and how far they were political, is not quite clear. Presumably, as Polignac had not yet shown his hand, they were mainly personal. Polignac had once served under Chateaubriand,<sup>1</sup> and therefore Chateaubriand could not, without damage to his vanity, serve under him. He therefore flung his resignation in Polignac's face, waited for Polignac to develop a policy, and then proceeded to oppose it; and as Polignac was not merely a Catholic, but a fanatic, in love with the cause of reaction, Chateaubriand, by the pressure of circumstances, became more and more avowedly and decidedly a Liberal.

His happiness, therefore, can by no means be attributed to political success. It would be more plausible, indeed, to attribute it to political failure and the popularity which it brought in its train. Chateaubriand was once more the idol of the people—hardly less their idol than Béranger—liable at any moment to be carried in triumph on their shoulders. He always liked that sort of thing, even though the loss of official emoluments compelled him, as he complained, to "work as a bookseller's hack." Moreover, Madame de Chateaubriand had left him for a season, to stay at Nice for the benefit of her health, and that also was a relief. And finally, and chiefly, he had won the love

<sup>1</sup> As Ambassador at London when Chateaubriand was Foreign Minister.

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and was enjoying the homage of Hortense, who had also returned to Paris.

The politics can wait, and we will return to Hortense (or Prudence) and her Enchantments which caused her sexagenarian lover to sigh, as she tells us : " Ah, me ! How I wish I were only fifty ! " And then, when she suggested that twenty-five would be still better : " No, no ! If I could go back to fifty, that would be far enough. "

## CHAPTER XXIX

Chateaubriand and Hortense in Paris—Their secret meetings—Walks in the Jardin des Plantes—Dinners in unfrequented restaurants—Chateaubriand persuades Hortense to accept an invitation to visit London—She does so, falls in love with Sir Henry Bulwer, and throws Chateaubriand over—His indignation—His vain attempts to win her back.

“Two old women, his wife and another——” that is how Prudence (or Hortense) dismisses Mesdames de Chateaubriand and Récamier. She adds that she was not jealous: “they guarded him for me alone to love.” For a moment, of course, there was also Marie; but Chateaubriand had found out that Marie was fifty, and was concerned about the “proprieties,” whereas Hortense was only twenty-seven or twenty-eight, and was not concerned about them. She wrote to him—M. Léon Séché has recovered these scraps of her handwriting—

“To-morrow, then, my illustrious friend! I trust you will be able to devote the whole evening to me.”

“René! I am going to make myself beautiful, to please you.”

And Prudence, in her retrospect, says—

“René, more and more enamoured, told me he had never before met so affectionate a woman.”

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She had then just finished writing a novel, and he helped her to correct the proofs, throwing "tenderness" even into that task, and into his advice that she should write history instead of fiction. His educational methods, she tells us, were "divine"; and when he started for the Pyrenees, it was arranged that Hortense should meet him at Étampes.

"We dined there as if in the seclusion of the desert. He was happy; he laughed; he murmured a thousand tender and delightful nothings, for his manner of being happy was to love, and to flatter, and to tell me again and again how enchanted and grateful he was. I, too, was enamoured and grateful. . . . We made no haste, and would have liked to hold back the passing hours. Only he was impatient for night to come, and rallied me on my coldness."

But the coldness was only timidity. Chateaubriand was so great a man, and moved in so grand a way through the world, that it took Hortense a little while to realize that, where a pretty woman was concerned, he differed from other people only in being more ardent for his age. She did realize it presently, however, and so "attained the happiness which one so often seeks in vain." The time, after Chateaubriand's return and resignation of his Embassy, "passed only too quickly," and the reason why he wrote in his *Mémoires* that *this year was the happiest of his life* was perfectly clear to Hortense. The italics are hers, and she goes on to explain them.

"He used to come to see me regularly, and our affection established itself on a firm basis. My love



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assumed a new intensity, and became passionate and constant. It was the autumn—the season of tenderness and melancholy. His ideas, his genius, his appearance, his love took possession of my life. From sunrise till sunset my heart was full of tender thoughts, and of an increasing enchantment.”

When she had nothing else to do, Hortense used to take the diligence into the country, and wander about the fields, thinking about her new lover. On other occasions Chateaubriand used to meet her in quiet corners of Paris. One of their favourite resorts was an unfrequented space in the neighbourhood of the Champ-de-Mars. There was an aged woman there with a cow, just as of old in our own St. James's Park, and they used to drink her milk, and talk to her. When they had more leisure, they met on the Pont d'Austerlitz, and found sheltered lovers' walks in the Jardin des Plantes. “I can see his charming smile,” says Hortense, “and his air of a man out for a holiday;” and she also had a recollection, no less lively, of their *tête-à-tête* dinners in the *cabinet particulier* of a remote restaurant where no one knew them.

“It was always a gay and charming banquet. Chateaubriand was as happy as a child—as gentle and as affectionate. . . . He had a splendid appetite and everything amused him. We spoke of literature and public affairs, and I talked a lot of delightful nonsense. . . . He spoke with emotion of his age, of death, of the inevitable end of all earthly pleasures, and of the imprudence of these delightful proceedings.

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“ He called for champagne, to cheer me up, as he said ; and then I used to sing him some of Béranger’s songs : ‘ Mon âme,’ ‘ la bonne Vieille,’ ‘ le Dieu des bonnes gens,’ etc. He listened to me with rapture, melted to tenderness by the beautiful poetry and the voice of his mistress. Moved and enthralled, he spoke once more about himself, saying that he too had written songs and would have liked to be a poet. He went back to the song which I had just finished, and made me sing it again, repeating some fine line or some striking phrase—

“ ‘ Plaisirs de mon jeune âge,  
Que d’un coup d’aile a fustigés le temps.’

“ These songs took him out of himself, aroused his genius, exalted him, and made him affectionate and melancholy. I never knew them fail to produce that powerful effect on him.

“ In this condition he was more amorous than ever. He told me how I pleased and charmed him, and called me his temptress—and, in that lonely place, he did with me what he would. Then at last, to my great regret, he said that it was time to go ; he had to do so because he was kept in leading strings at home. So we drove off together, with many expressions of tenderness, to the Place Maubert, where we separated. I really was in love with him . . . and it was he who moderated the transports of my heart.”

And then one day, when Hortense, instead of singing, read aloud to Chateaubriand some extracts from his own works—

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“He was touched and grateful, and told me that he had never enjoyed anything so much, and called me by all the beautiful names that belong to the Muses. He persuaded himself that I was beautiful, and praised my eyes and my expression. He really believed, in his madness, that he had never seen anything like them before. Never in my life have I known a man to be so blinded and enchanted.”

Hortense, when she wrote that, had had many experiences, and had acquired the right to draw comparisons and deliver judgments. Yet, as it happened, at this moment at which Chateaubriand's eyes seemed so completely blinded by his passion, the end of the passion was near.

It was in the spring of 1830, when the July Revolution was imminent. Chateaubriand was in the thick of the agitation, fighting shoulder to shoulder with Béranger and Thiers, whom Hortense had introduced to him. It would be an exaggeration to say that he was tired of her; but he found himself too busy to attend to her. Very possibly, too, he was embarrassed by her proposal to take a lodging in his immediate neighbourhood. So he persuaded her to accept an invitation which she had received to visit London—“an imprudent course,” says Hortense, “if he was really in love with me, for he really ought to have known how rash it is to let youth go wandering in quest of adventures, especially in the languorous spring season.”

Hortense departed, therefore, “without having yet known what love really was”; and England completed her education. Henry Bulwer, afterwards Lord Dalling, a young man of her own age, then a candidate

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for Parliament, was introduced to her, and took Chateaubriand's place.

She does not call him Henry Bulwer in the *Enchantements*; she calls him Henry Warwick. In the letters to Saint-Beuve, however, there is no mystification. To her confidant Hortense says Bulwer boldly, so that Warwick can be identified with Bulwer beyond the possibility of denial. Bulwer, she assures us—and she says it so emphatically that we must needs believe her—was, of all her lovers, the one whom she loved best. She found him “a man of ambition, but a dandy,” and was in full sympathy with his view that “it was not necessary to be ponderous in order to be intelligent.” He began by taking her to see the Tower, the National Gallery, and Westminster Abbey; but he had not known her many days before he had fallen at her feet, protesting that, though he could not marry her, as his mother would not hear of his doing so, he would like to treat her, in other respects, as his wife. She yielded, and wrote to Chateaubriand in verse—

“Vous êtes offensé. La fortune jalouse  
N’a pas en votre absence épargné votre épouse :  
Indigne de vous voir et de vous approcher,  
Je ne dois désormais songer qu’à me cacher.”

Which means—

“You have been wronged. While absent from your side,  
Fortune, grown envious, has not spared your bride.  
Unworthy to approach you as before,  
I can but hide from you for evermore.”

It was a cruel stroke of irony, and a quick punishment for indifference and neglect. Having fired her



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shaft, Hortense went on a honeymoon with Henry Bulwer to Saint Valéry-sur-Somme—a little watering-place at the ends of the earth, where he was fairly sure of meeting no one who knew him—and travelled with him in Belgium, where he was sent on a diplomatic mission, and lived with him at Hampstead, at Brompton, at Putney, and elsewhere. It would be a long story if one told it all; but the details belong, of course, to a life of Lord Dalling, or of Hortense herself, rather than to a life of Chateaubriand. One might be tempted, indeed, to dwell upon Hortense's attempt to make Bulwer jealous by smiling on Charles Babbage, the inventor of the calculating machine; for there is something very titillating to the fancy in the picture of Chateaubriand, Lord Dalling, and Charles Babbage as rivals for the favours of the same frail lady. But even that inquiry would be out of place, as would also any attempt to recount the vicissitudes of a *liaison* which lasted for about six years. It is enough to mention that the lovers ultimately separated, but remained friends, and were still in affectionate correspondence when Bulwer was in Washington negotiating the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, and that Chateaubriand, in the meanwhile, and for the first time in his life, knew the pains of jealousy.

He had foreseen them, and in semi-scriptural language had predicted them. "I shall die on your breast," he had said. "You will betray me, and I shall pardon you." And that was what happened—ultimately, though not at once.

At first Chateaubriand was not only hurt, but indignant. As soon as Hortense reached Paris, he hurried to see her—"proud, but quivering with excite-

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ment"—and protested. So she had come to her third lover already! A third lover at her time of life! And an Englishman too—the enemy of our country! That was the climax! In forsaking him for an Englishman Hortense was really behaving shamefully. Was her Englishman going to marry her? If marriage were what she wanted, well "he himself would be free some day." He would promise faithfully to marry her when Madame de Chateaubriand died, and they would go and live happily together in the Italy that she loved. In short, he "used every argument which he thought might move me"; and then, finding her inflexible to eloquence, he went away and wrote to her—

"I made no attempt to deceive him in my answers, and he protested that my sincerity was something terrible. All women deceived men, he said, and he would have much preferred to be deceived. When I did not answer him immediately, he imagined that I was meaning to yield, but at last he left me in peace and ceased to write. 'Hortense,' he wrote, 'you have betrayed me. I have done nothing to deserve to lose you.' He asked me to return his letters, and I gave them all back to him. He sent me some of mine, but kept those which pleased him best."

That is all—or nearly all—the story. Chateaubriand implored Hortense to consent to see him again, and she imposed the condition that he should promise to "make no attempt upon her virtue." He humiliated himself and gave the promise; and then a few other letters passed.

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“Do not destroy my illusion, if illusion indeed it be. We will work together. I want to love your talent as I love yourself. You shall be my last Muse, my last enchantment, my last ray of sunshine. So do not say good-bye. I lay my soul at your feet.”

“I write to you once more from the high road. I am always wandering, but you will always find me. If there is anything that I can do to make you happy . . . if you think of me as somewhat different from ordinary men . . . then the snows and storms of the Alps will be quickly dissipated by your magic. My life is only an accident. I know I ought never to have been born. . . . Write me more of those letters which kindle my emotions—such letters as you used to write in the early days of our love. Why do I no longer feel that you love me? I need your love so badly. I can give you more love in a day than others could give you in the course of many years. So let me see you soon. I kiss your hands and feet.”

And then, two years later—

“I am just going to read *Valentine*.

‘Vous vieillirez, ô ma jeune maîtresse,  
Vous vieillirez et je ne serai plus.’

“That is how I shall be avenged for your infidelity.”

And that is really all; for the fact that Hortense and Chateaubriand still met from time to time, and occasionally wrote to each other, and were good friends, proves nothing and needs no commentary. That was

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his way—and hers—and the way of the world at the time : a small world in which sulking over such incompatibilities was an embarrassment to common friends and therefore a breach of etiquette.

So Hortense passes out of the story ; and one says good-bye to her almost with a sense of personal loss, and with an irresistible temptation to linger over the parting words. She was so fair, so frail, so frank about her frailty—so firmly convinced that frailty was the way of salvation as well as the path to happiness ! So disinterested too—so free from every mercenary taint ; so grateful to her lovers, and so ready to forgive them ; so sincere while she loved, and yet so quick to live a disappointment down and love again ; so proud, so clever, so conscientious after her fashion ; so complete a pagan, with such a dashing readiness to prove that she had the courage of her convictions ! She forces one, whether one will or not, to take her paganism seriously, and wonder whether she was right when she said that the moralists were wrong, and whether, if her theories of right and wrong and love and *camaraderie* prevailed——

But all that has nothing to do with Chateaubriand. He was sixty-four when he wrote the last letter quoted about vengeance for infidelity, and Hortense was only thirty-two. It still pleased him to revive memories and bask in them ; he still continued to murmur the language of sentiment even when he hobbled upon the last stage of his pilgrimage with tottering steps. But he meant nothing by it. The words had ceased to bear any relation to action or even to ambition. The loosening hold of the passions had left him free for friendship. Madame Récamier had forgiven him both



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the infidelities which she had discovered and the infidelities which she had only guessed ; and there was no longer any reason why he should not spread his life, as he had wished to do, as a carpet of flowers at her feet.

## CHAPTER XXX

The July Revolution—Chateaubriand's refusal to swear allegiance to Louis-Philippe—Retires to Geneva—Returns to Paris to raise money—Withdraws to Lucerne—Visited by Alexandre Dumas—Meets Madame Récamier at Constance—Visits Queen Hortense at Arenenberg—Goes again to Geneva—Is joined there by Madame Récamier—Hears of the arrest of the Duchesse de Berry in La Vendée—Hurries back to Paris.

THE political activities of Chateaubriand's later years may be passed over quickly.

When the July Revolution, which was in a sense and to some extent his work, broke out, he was at Dieppe with Madame Récamier. It is not impossible that Madame Récamier's desire that he should go to Dieppe with her was one of his reasons for advising Hortense to take a holiday in England; for, if Hortense had stayed in France, his competing obligations might have clashed. Hearing the news of the Revolution, however, he hurried back to Paris to see what was happening, and await developments.

Meaning to overthrow a ministry, he had overthrown, or helped to overthrow, a king. Charles X had retired to Rambouillet to play whist while his soldiers—or as many of them as remained loyal—were fighting for him in the streets of his capital. Persuaded at last that the situation was really serious, he interrupted his rubber and fled to England; and the Duc d'Orléans was chosen to succeed him as

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King, not of France but of the French, with the tricolour instead of the fleur-de-lys for his flag. Chateaubriand refused to swear allegiance to him, and refusing, found himself relegated at once to the position of a leader without followers.

His reasons for refusing were probably complex. A personal dislike for the Duc d'Orléans was certainly included among them. But he was also a Breton—a true son of the land of impossible loyalties. Though, as a leader of the Opposition, he had been carried in triumph on the shoulders of the populace, he felt for kings—and especially for princesses—in their misfortunes the sentiments which the chivalrous feel for beauty in distress. The man who laid his hand upon a king, save in the way of kindness, seemed to him unworthy of the name of a patriotic Frenchman. Just, therefore, as in 1792 he had fought for a king to whose cause he was, at the bottom of his heart, indifferent, so now he struck attitudes and wrote letters to the papers on behalf of a king who had treated him badly and had no claim on his attachment except his descent from Saint Louis.

Fighting, since the King himself did not propose to fight, was out of the question; but the case was distinctly one for a demonstration and a *beau geste*. Chateaubriand could at least tell Louis-Philippe and his ministers—Casimir-Périer and the rest—what he thought of them; and he could also resign all his offices and emoluments, and sell all his property, and threaten to shake the dust of France off his feet for ever.

He did so. He called the Orleanists usurpers

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whose authority rested neither upon divine right nor upon popular approval. He compared them to the thieves who avail themselves of the confusion of a fire to break into houses and steal. He said that they were "bourgeois," with no thoughts for anything but their money bags—"as devoted to their money bags as were Napoleon's soldiers to the tricolour, or the Huguenots to the white plumes in the helmet of Henry of Navarre." For his part, he said, he would have none of their pensions and none of their peerages. He would like even, if it were possible, to abandon the stipend attached to his seat in the Academy; and, in any case, he proposed to leave them, and live in Switzerland. Then, having fired these shafts, he set out for Geneva.

"I am too far from you already. I have never made so melancholy a journey," he wrote to Madame Récamier from Lyons. And to Ampère—the ardent Ampère who had settled down as a school-master and remained his friend after abandoning the pretension to be his rival—he wrote, soon after he arrived—

"The age of illusions is over for me. I have played my part, and my career is finished. . . . The future beyond the grave is the youth of the men whose hair has turned white. I hope I shall make a better use of this second youth than I made of the first."

Then, writing again to Madame Récamier, he tells her of attempts that the local Protestants are making to engage him in theological disputes. A



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Protestant pamphlet has been advertised, and a local paper has exhorted the pamphleteer to stand firm because "the author of *Le Génie du Christianisme* is waiting for him." But what of that? The author of *Le Génie du Christianisme* has no time for Christianity at present. His chief thought is of his urgent need for money—

"I was left stripped as naked as a little Saint John," he writes in the *Mémoires*. "My gold lace, my sword knots, my shoulder straps, my epaulettes, sold to a Jew to be melted down, fetched only seven hundred francs. That was the net cash product of all my grandeurs."

And seven hundred francs is only £28—a sum which does not carry an extravagant man far; and other sources of supply were drying up. Chateaubriand wanted to sell his house; but it was mortgaged, and he could not obtain a price which would enable him to pay the mortgage off. His publisher, too, had gone bankrupt—a calamity not confined to modern times. That was one reason for not remaining long in exile; and the appeals of his friends and admirers furnished another. Béranger called him back in verse—

"Chateaubriand, pourquoi fuir ta patrie,  
Fuir son amour, son encens, et nos soins?"

Then, on top of that, came the news that there was still work for him to do in politics. A law was to be proposed, banishing Charles X and his heirs from France for ever; and notice had been given of

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an amendment making the death penalty the sanction of that law. It was to combat those propositions that Chateaubriand returned ; and though the former proposition was carried in spite of his sonorous rhetoric, he ultimately had his reward. Charles X sent him twenty thousand francs. He borrowed an equal amount from his nephew Louis, and set out for Lucerne, where Madame de Chateaubriand was to join him—"in quest," he writes, "of an asylum in which I might finish writing my *Mémoires*, and dragging with me an enormous load of luggage, composed of memoranda, diplomatic documents, confidential notes, and letters addressed to me by ministers and kings."

That was in 1832—the year in which the Duchesse de Berry tried to raise a Legitimist insurrection in La Vendée. Chateaubriand had heard of her enterprise and had sent her a letter imploring her to abandon it on the ground that "civil war is always an awful thing," and would only, if attempted at that moment, "cause French blood to be shed in vain." He imagined, no doubt, since he was addressing a woman—albeit a princess—that he had only to speak to be obeyed ; but the mother of Henri V nevertheless continued on her way, while he continued on his.

At Vesoul he met Augustin Thierry, and at Lucerne he received a passing visit from the great Alexandre Dumas, who was also travelling in Switzerland for reasons with which politics had quite as much to do as the dilapidated condition of his health. There is a graphic account of the interview in Dumas' *Impressions de Voyage*, more graphic, it may be, than faithful to the facts.

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Dumas, we read, was nervous in the presence of so great a man: *Obstupuit . . . vox faucibus haesit*; and one has a difficulty in picturing the ventripotent mulatto thus overwhelmed and awed even by the Defender of the Faith. Chateaubriand, however, composed him, if he needed to be composed, by affability, and led him out to look at Thorwaldsen's monument—*Helvetiorum fidei ac virtuti*—and to see him throw bread to the wild fowl from the bridge over the Reuss. His lips smiled, says Dumas, but his eyes were grave and melancholy. Sad thoughts passed over his brow as clouds are swept across the sky: "I divined that this was the moment of the day which he reserved for meditating about France."

Both Dumas and the wild fowl are mentioned in the diary incorporated in the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*; but Chateaubriand's thoughts seem to have been less of France than of himself. He crossed the Saint Gothard, and had a vision of "the sylph of the woods of Combourg"; and he apostrophized the imaginary enchantress: "Come, sit on my knees! Have no fear of my white hairs, but caress them with your shadowy fairy fingers!" And then, standing on the summit of the pass, he thanked the revolutions that had set him free to follow the bent of his own nature—

"I have still enough vitality in my veins to recall my earliest dreams; still fire enough to renew my passion for the creature of my fancy and desires. The years and the world which I have passed through have been for me only a double solitude in which I have kept myself as Heaven made me. Why then should I lament the rapid flight of time, seeing that

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I have lived more in an hour than others in a lifetime?"

He descended into the golden sunshine of the Italian Lakes, and looked listlessly for a villa, considering whether it would please him to remain in this smiling place of exile—

"How if I were to finish my *Mémoires* at the gates of this classic land, in which Virgil and Tasso sang—in which so many revolutions have been accomplished? How if I were to review my Breton destiny in sight of these Italian mountains? If their curtain lifted, it would reveal the plains of Lombardy—with Rome beyond—and beyond Rome, Naples, Sicily, Greece, Syria, Egypt, Carthage: those distant shores which I once trod—I who no longer own so much ground as the sole of my foot covers. And yet to die here? To end my days here? Perhaps it is what I wish—what I am looking for. And yet I do not know."

He did not know; and, not knowing, he went back to Lucerne, and picked flowers on the banks of the Reuss, and gave them to the chambermaid. That was when "M. A. Dumas" came to call on him; and his intimate thoughts, it is evident, were other than M. A. Dumas supposed. Perhaps his vision of "the sylph of the woods of Combourg" had borne some resemblance to Hortense Allart—the one woman who had tired of him instead of waiting for him to tire of her—and so made his sense of the march of time more painful to him than he allows. At all events he became restless, and felt that he must once more move



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on ; and as Madame Récamier, in flight from the cholera, was coming to Constance, he decided to join her there at the end of August.

They walked by the lake side together, and sat down on a rustic bench. Madame Récamier was carrying one of those commonplace books, or albums, in which women of that period used to ask their friends to inscribe some thought or sentiment. The last entry was Rousseau's alleged dying speech : " Open the window, my wife, and let me see the light of the sun again " ; and Chateaubriand wrote underneath—

" That which I sought on the Lake of Lucerne, I have found on the Lake of Constance : the charm and intelligence of beauty. I do not want to die like Rousseau. I wish to go on seeing the sun for a long time yet, if my last days are to be spent with you. May my last years break and die away at your feet, like those waves whose murmuring ripple you hear."

On the following day Chateaubriand dined at Arenenberg with Queen Hortense and Louis Bonaparte, the future Napoleon III. His next stage was once again to Lucerne, where Madame de Chateaubriand had arranged to meet him. Lucerne, Madame de Chateaubriand discovered, was too damp for her ; so they moved, in the course of September, to Geneva, and formed vague plans of wintering there and afterwards visiting Italy.

Madame Récamier joined them—she could hardly do less after what Chateaubriand had written in her album. Her correspondence with Ballanche and Ampère shows her trying to persuade him to return to

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Paris, where, says Ballanche, "his world-wide fame will protect him better than anywhere else." He went with her to Coppet, where she wished to weep by the tomb of Madame de Staël, and sat, waiting and meditating, till she came out, "pale and in tears," from the dark clump of trees which surrounds the mausoleum. He walked with her in the meadows by the banks of the Rhone, and they conjured up the memory of "those years, so painful and so bitterly regretted, when the passions of our youth were at once our happiness and our torture."

And then came news. The Duchesse de Berry, who had gone her own way and raised the white flag in Vendée in defiance of Chateaubriand's advice, had been discovered and arrested; and once more Chateaubriand heard the call to action and decided to return to Paris.

## CHAPTER XXXI

Another pamphlet—"Madame, your son is my king"—Chateaubriand prosecuted—His acquittal—The Duchesse de Berry bears a child in prison—Her announcement of her secret marriage—She sends Chateaubriand to break the news to Charles X at Prague—His journey, adventures, and reception—His visit to the Duchesse d'Angoulême at Carlsbad—The Duchesse de Berry, released from prison, summons him to Italy—He meets her at Ferrara—She sends him on a second errand to Charles X, which proves fruitless.

THE Duchesse de Berry had been betrayed by a Jew named Deutz, whose pieces of silver a contemptuous minister had handed to him with a pair of tongs. Tracked to a house in Nantes, she had hidden herself in a secret chamber behind the fire-place. The lighting of the fire had smoked her out; and she had been arrested and imprisoned in the fortress of Blaye, to await her trial.

Chateaubriand, though he had discountenanced her insurrection and refused to be a member of the "secret government" which she had proposed to constitute in France, now asked permission to act as counsel for the defence. He could not do that, as no trial ever took place; and he failed even to obtain leave to visit her in her place of detention. Thus baffled, he challenged opinion as usual with a pamphlet: his *Mémoire sur la captivité de Mme. la Duchesse de Berry*.

It was an explosion of ringing defiance of the ruling powers. One sentence in particular could be

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read as a treasonable manifesto : *Madame, your son is my King*. The editors of the royalist newspapers quoted the phrase with enthusiasm. Their journals were seized and they were prosecuted. Chateaubriand insisted upon being prosecuted too, declined the services of the great orator Berryer as his advocate, but spoke in his own defence in the hall from which Fouquier-Tinville had sent Danton to the scaffold. He was acquitted, as were also the other defendants, amid scenes of wild enthusiasm. Ardent young royalists were with difficulty dissuaded from taking the horses from his carriage and dragging him home in triumph. *Madame, your son is my King*, pronounced a lawful saying by a jury, was taken by the Legitimists as their motto, engraved upon women's necklaces and rings, and printed on the front page of newspapers.

And then a strange thing happened : the Duchesse de Berry bore a child in prison.

Her enemies were astonished and amused ; her friends were astonished and grieved ; her family were astonished and shocked. She felt—she could not help feeling—that she owed an explanation, if not to Louis-Philippe or the governor of the jail, at least to her father-in-law, Charles X ; and she decided that Chateaubriand was the one man whom she could trust to speak for her.

Though he was not allowed to visit her at Blaye, she managed to get a letter conveyed to him. She would rather have seen him, she wrote ; she had “so much to tell.” Above all, she had wanted to talk about her baby. She had intended it to be a secret baby, whose existence should be known only to the most intimate of her confidantes ; but it had been born



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in such painfully public circumstances that it was only by telling the whole truth that she could silence the voice of slander. The fact was that, while in Italy, she had secretly married Count Lucchesi-Palli—of a good old family, and a descendant of one of the twelve companions of Tancred—and this was the result. Would Chateaubriand go to Charles X, who had lately left Holyrood for Prague, and break the news to him, and beg him to allow his daughter-in-law, in spite of her *mésalliance*, to retain her rank as a French princess?

He set out at once in a carriage which had once belonged to Talleyrand—a vehicle, he says, “but imperfectly adapted by its origin and habits to the task of running after fallen kings.” As far as Basle, and even further, he travelled almost in triumph. In the old Swiss frontier town, a school-boy handed him an address “to the Virgil of the nineteenth century,” consisting of the quotation: *Macte animo, generose puer*;<sup>1</sup> and he proceeded—“very proud of my high renown”—through Schaffhausen, Ulm, Blenheim, and Ratisbon, to Waldmünchen, on the Austrian frontier, where he was held up at the Customs House because his passport had no Austrian *visa*.

Carrying confidential documents, and fearing to be detained or searched, he had not dared to arouse suspicion by asking for one. He had only, he imagined, to mention his name in order to be allowed to pass; and indeed nothing more was necessary in Switzerland, Wurtemberg, or Bavaria. The guardian of the Austrian frontier, however, professed never to have

<sup>1</sup> From Statius, though Chateaubriand erroneously attributes it to Virgil.

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heard of him. "I felt as humiliated," he confesses, "as Cicero when he returned from his government in Asia and was asked by his friends whether he had come from Baiae or from his Tusculan villa;" but there was nothing for it but to write to the Governor of Bohemia and wait for his answer in this remote village on the outskirts of Bavarian civilization. He waited, therefore, noting his thoughts daily in his journal.

A funeral passed beneath his window, and he reflected that the dead man had probably died without hearing of him. A pretty girl passed, and he reflected that, if he had been younger, he might have fled the time carelessly in gallant adventure—a thing which he could no longer do at the age of sixty-four, because he had been so little parsimonious of his vigour in the past. He discovered that the local brewer was not only aware of his celebrity, but had bought his books, and kept them on the same shelf as the mugs. There was comfort in that, and also in the recollection that he had once received an expression of admiration from a lady in Peru. On the whole, however, he was bored, and his relief was great when the Governor apologized for the constable and accorded him permission to proceed.

He proceeded, and was received in audience by the royal exile—white-haired, and bowed down beneath the burden of his seventy-six years, his misfortunes, and the tyrannical influence of the Jesuits. He was entertained at dinner, and thanked, and offered money, though the King had so little of it that he was grateful for the hospitality which allowed him to live rent free. He refused the money, though he had so

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little of it that the Duchesse de Berry had had to lend him 6,000 francs before he could go upon her errand. There was some pleasant talk about his extravagant dissipation of his resources. "What the devil do you spend it all on?" the King asked genially; and Chateaubriand—that "basket with a hole in the bottom of it," as the King had called him when he wanted fifty louis to buy an ass that Madame de Chateaubriand might drink ass's milk—could only answer that he was unbusiness-like and did not know. But when the talk turned on the Duchesse de Berry and her baby, the King was not amenable.

The adventure in La Vendée had displeased him; "a mad folly," was his description of it. It was not easy to persuade him that her case was like that of Henri IV, who had also stirred up civil strife, "and had not always been strong enough to win." That baby, which had arrived so unexpectedly, to the entertainment of the ribald, made a difference; and therefore, after much argument—

"Very well, Mr. Ambassador. Let the Duchesse de Berry go to Palermo. Let her live there openly, demonstrating to the whole world that M. Lucchesi is her husband. Then we will tell the children that their mother has married again, and she shall be allowed to come here and embrace them.'

That was all that Charles X could be induced to say. Having made his partial concession, he changed the subject and talked of other things—of the education of his grandchildren, the state of France, the conduct of the Duc d'Orléans, and the question

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whether he would not himself have done better to fight for his throne instead of abdicating. Chateaubriand reminded him that Bonaparte had abdicated; "and thus," he concludes, "I sheltered the weakness of my king behind the glory of Napoleon."

His mission to Prague terminated, Chateaubriand went on to Carlsbad to wait on the Duchesse d'Angoulême, who was taking the waters there. She was perfectly polite, and as kind as she knew how to be, but not in the least cordial. Her heart had been chilled in prison and in exile; she could still weep—but only for her own memories and troubles. She was very sorry to hear what had happened to the Duchesse de Berry—very sorry indeed in a cold, conventional way, and as a matter of politeness and routine. She sent her a few lines, ostensibly of sympathy and most correctly phrased, in answer to her letter; but as for exerting her influence with the King—well, the King was the King, and must decide things for himself.

So Chateaubriand left her, and once more took the road for Paris, writing his diary as he went, and filling it with the vague meditative fancies of the man who leans back among the cushions, abandons himself to day-dreams, and lives in memories. He crosses a river—how many rivers has he not crossed in his time! He passes Bayreuth—and the slender forest pines remind him of the pillars of the mosques of Cairo, and the cathedral of Cordova. He passes Bamberg—and it was there, was it not, that Berthier, Prince of Neuchatel, threw himself out of the window? He enters a wayside church to pray—and why, oh



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why, is he not a monk at Rome? A swallow flies in at his window while he is at dinner—and is it now, perhaps, of the family of the swallows that built their nest under Charlotte's window at Bungay? He reaches Meaux—and Meaux recalls Bossuet and his warning that “man reaches the grave, dragging after him the long chain of his disappointed hopes.” And so on, and so forth, through many pages of melodious eloquence, until he is back in Paris and receives the news that the Duchesse de Berry has been released from Blaye, and would be grateful to him if he would meet her at Venice and once more help her with his advice.

Her man of business supplied the money, and he set out on a fresh pilgrimage, early in September, crossing the Alps for the tenth time, and still keeping his diary, and still filling it with his thoughts of what had, and might have, been.

He stopped at Bex—and perhaps the horses which drew him were the same which had drawn the hearse of Delphine de Custine. He rested at Sion—and that was where he might have lived as Minister Plenipotentiary if he had not resented the murder of the Duc d'Enghien. He crossed the Simplon—and when last he crossed it, he had been on his way to take charge of the French Embassy at Rome, whereas now . . . He paused at Verona—and Verona had seen the real beginnings of his political career, and what a difference it would have made to the world if that career had not been interrupted by a miserable jealousy! And so to Venice.

Madame had not arrived, and he had to wait for her, dreamily seeing the sights by day, and dreamily

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dropping his thoughts into his diary by night. He visited palaces and prisons, and reviewed the careers of prisoners and poets—of Silvio Pellico, and Rousseau, and Byron—and he loitered in cemeteries and recalled the memories of dead and forgotten courtesans. Twenty-six years had passed since the day when he embarked at Venice for Jerusalem, leaving Madame de Chateaubriand in charge of “the worthy Ballanche” while he sought glory to lay at the feet of Natalie de Noailles-Mouchy. A quarter of a century! And what hard things he would say of that quarter of a century, if it were not for the happy accident of his meeting with—Madame Récamier! And so forth until the message came that Madame would like him to wait on her at Ferrara.

He got there before her; and Ferrara recalled the wanderings and sufferings of Tasso. He had himself been compared to Tasso in Fontanes’ charming poem, “*Le Tasse, errant de ville en ville.*” What could he do better than than enter Tasso’s story in the pages of his diary while he waited? He wrote it there, and was thinking of the Man of Genius—one cannot be quite sure whether the reference is to Tasso or himself—as “a Christ, persecuted, scourged, crowned with thorns, and crucified,” when at last Madame drove up to the inn, girlish, excited, ebullient, and exclaiming: “My son is your king; so help me to get through the crowd.”

He helped her, and then learnt that he was to be dispatched on a further errand. First, Madame de Berry feared to go to Prague alone, and insisted that Chateaubriand should go with her. Then she was informed by the police that she could not be allowed

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to go at all, and begged Chateaubriand to go instead of her. Henri V, according to French law, would attain his majority at the age of fourteen, and the coming 29th of September would be his fourteenth birthday. It was proposed that he should, on that date, publish a solemn protest against Louis-Philippe's usurpation. As he was a child, in fact, though legally a man, it would be necessary to obtain Charles X's approval of the step. Chateaubriand must see to that.

So he was off again, with little hope that any good would come of his journey, but summoning his Breton obstinacy to his aid and persevering. "I obey your orders, Madame," he said, "but I shall be able to accomplish nothing." "No, no, you are all-powerful," said the Duchesse de Berry, pushing him out of the door; but the event showed that Chateaubriand was right.

The King was polite, considerate, and kind. Though he was ill in bed, he had Chateaubriand brought up to him. He cast his eyes over the proposed manifesto, and "seemed to approve of it"; but that was all. Nothing was done; and Chateaubriand quite understood that nothing would be done, for he could see that other influences were at work. Just as the men about the King were, for him, only Jesuits in disguise, so he, for them, was only a Republican in disguise; and they, jealous of his intrusion, and sure of having the last word with a monarch who was little more than a shadow, were bound to get their way.

They got it; and the royalists of France waited in vain for the expected manifesto; and Chateaubriand

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drove back to Paris, and to private life. He had a few more books to publish ; but his main occupation in the years that followed was to receive homage, and prepare his *Mémoires* and so build himself a monument of enduring fame.



## CHAPTER XXXII

Last years—The reading of Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* in Madame Récamier's salon—The hour of Chateaubriand's triumph—The gradual decline of his powers—Madame Récamier's affection for him—His last illness and death.

ONCE again at the age of sixty-five, Chateaubriand was driven to "earn his bread" by working as "a publisher's hack." He translated *Paradise Lost* "at so much the yard." He also edited the aphorisms of his friend Joubert, and the collected works of his friend Fontanes; and then he wrote his History of the Congress of Verona.

There were those who said that he had been no more than a fifth wheel of the coach at that great diplomatic gathering. The sneer is repeated in the *Memoirs of Baron de Frénilly*, lately published. He wished to prove that "his war" was really his, and had been made inevitable by his diplomacy, for the greater glory of France. Diplomatic historians must decide whether the demonstration is conclusive. Chateaubriand received forty thousand francs for it; and it helped to pay his debts. The last of all his books is the *Vie de Rancé*; but about that there is nothing to be said except that it is the tired work of a man of seventy-five.

Long before that, however, he had definitely insured himself against indigence by accepting a

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pension of twelve thousand francs from the Comte de Chambord, and by arranging for the posthumous publication of the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*. Just as in the old days when Madame de Duras took charge of his finances, his friends and some men of business formed a joint stock company to acquire his copyrights; and this time there was an element of permanence and stability in the arrangement. The work hypothecated was already in existence; and part of the purchase money was paid in the form of an annuity. Two hundred and fifty thousand francs down and an annuity of twelve thousand francs, to be continued to Madame de Chateaubriand, if she survived her husband, was the price agreed upon for the book rights; and for the serial rights a further sum of eighty thousand francs was subsequently paid.

In his old age, therefore, Chateaubriand was reasonably well provided for, enjoying a steady income of nearly £1000 a year, in addition to the interest derived from any sums which the claims of his creditors left him free to invest. His ability thus to endow himself from the prospective proceeds of his record of things seen and done and experienced—and above all, imagined—is the most eloquent of all proofs of the unique position which he had attained in the eyes of his contemporaries. He was the patriarch of letters, and the hungry generations could not tread him down.

Some of the younger men might laugh—some of them, in fact, did laugh—at his pomposity, his affectations, and the sustained magnificence of his funereal gloom. Sainte-Beuve, as soon as he felt free to do

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so, laughed at him all through a course of twenty-one literary lectures delivered at Liège. Alfred de Vigny declared that he spent the later years of his life as a weeping willow by the side of his own grave. Lamartine derided the court of women, who formed, he said, his "real public," and tried to screen him, with "smiles, and reverence, and caresses," from the "less feminine judgment of posterity." But the derision, after all, was rather envious than disdainful; and Chateaubriand, seated on his throne, with duchesses reclining at his feet, and looking up into his eyes, would have felt no difficulty in classing it with the crackling of thorns under a pot.

He had achieved great things; and the men who sneered, as well as the women who worshipped, had to admit it. *Le Génie du Christianisme* might not have done much for Christianity; but it had done a great deal for literature. It had revealed new possibilities in the harmonious use of language, and marked the opening of a new era as surely as did the storming of the Bastille. And the gorgeous style had been the expression of a gorgeous and forceful personality—a personality of the triumphant type which, with all its weaknesses and inconsistencies, commands admiration as a finished work of art.

The cruel could say that his life had been a pose. The just would think of it rather as a pageant to which a pose was a necessary adjunct. It was not a pose which Chateaubriand invented; but it seemed his own when he assumed it. He was in the very skin of the part of the world-weary Titan, who had had kingdoms at his feet, and had tasted all experiences, from the love of God to the love of women, and, after yawning his

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way through life, had earned the right to tell the world what was vanity and what was not. And, therefore, he imposed a glamour, and was interesting, and entitled to his place of honour in the centre of the stage. The very men who mocked were jealous, and would gladly have imitated him if they could. Sainte-Beuve himself—the man who mocked most bitterly—had tried to do so, and only recovered his sense of humour, and ceased trying, when he realized that he was not destined to succeed. Victor Hugo, as we all know, not only tried, but succeeded. “Chateaubriand ou rien” was his version of “aut Cæsar aut nullus”; and he lived up to the motto to the last.

The culminating hour of triumph came when Chateaubriand assembled his friends to hear the reading of the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*. Rousseau, it will be remembered, had similarly assembled his friends to listen to his *Confessions*; and what a world of difference between the two historic scenes!

Jean-Jacques' reading had been the desperate act of a lunatic who believed himself to be a maligned and injured man—a rat, as it were, driven by imaginary pursuers into an imaginary corner. He was persuaded that he had only to asperse the characters of women who had been kind to him in order to unmask a conspiracy and confound his enemies. He tried the experiment, and the only result of it was that he pained and grieved his friends. They heard him in ominous silence, and sniggered, and took careful notes of those admissions as to the follies of his youth which were most damaging to his reputation as a philosopher and a man of sentiment.



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No anti-climax of that kind lurked in wait for Chateaubriand, and he fell into no such pit of bathos. Proud of many things, he was specially proud, as he has told us many times, of the contrast between Jean-Jacques' paltry spite and his own magnanimous grandeur. There is more than a little arrogance in the frequency of the assertion, for Jean-Jacques, after all, could not help being a poor man and a *parvenu*; and much of the contrast lies in Chateaubriand's greater genius for stage effects; but the fact remains that the contrast was never more striking than on the occasion of these readings at the Abbaye-aux-Bois.

The audience, says Lamartine, was "carefully sifted and selected" so as to exclude all unsympathetic or irreverent elements. Madame Récamier would not have been Madame Récamier if she had not been eminently capable of seeing to that. There were dukes and duchesses present to represent the *ultras* of the *ancien régime*; old friends like Ballanche and Ampère; members of the family like Charles Lenormant, who had married Madame Récamier's niece; an occasional stranger with good introductions like Mrs. Trollope; an abbé or two; and such rising representatives of the press and the literature of the future as Edgar Quinet and Sainte-Beuve. Some of the latter were to laugh presently—but not yet—not for a good many years to come. Awe, for the moment, effectually checked all ribald inclinations. Madame Récamier saw to that, too; with the result that even Sainte-Beuve wrote of Chateaubriand as "the most illustrious of our contemporaries."

He sat on a conspicuous chair, like a king established on his throne. The court of women disposed

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themselves at his feet on stools ; and the court of men stood ranged in serried ranks in the background. He arrived, when the stage was set and the house waiting, carrying his sheets of manuscript wrapped in a silk handkerchief, and handed them to Ampère or Lenormant, who took it in turns to read ; while he listened with the air of a man to whom their elocution perpetually revealed fresh and unsuspected beauties in his own composition.

Rousseau had wearied his audience by readings which lasted, with brief intervals for refreshment, for seventeen hours at a stretch. Chateaubriand and Madame Récamier knew better. His readings were adjourned while his listeners were still eager for more ; and the pleasure, thus extended from one reception day to another, lasted for many weeks, and formed the talk and the leading attraction of literary Paris.

There was nothing in the text to shock the taste of the fastidious—that was another of the respects in which Chateaubriand showed, and made a point of showing, his superiority to Rousseau. He had never stolen a piece of ribbon and thrown the blame upon a servant maid, and had no need to make ignominious admissions. He took away no woman's character ; and it was well known that none of the women who had loved him had fared as badly as Madame de Warens. Perhaps some of the references to Madame Récamier were just a little . . . Some of her friends came to her quietly afterwards and said so, reminding her that she was no longer so young as she had been, and that the code of propriety was stricter than in the days of her youth, and that a certain reference to a certain lonely walk at the dead of night in a dark and

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mysterious wood might lend itself to—well, to uncharitable misconstructions. But the allusion, after all, was made in the grand manner—so differently from Rousseau's account of his night in the wood with Madame d'Houdetot—and invested with so much poetry, and delicacy, and charm, that no qualms were felt and no questions raised until after the company had dispersed, and the newspaper men had begun to dispute for permission to print fragments of the promised masterpiece in the reviews and journals to which they were attached.

That was the apogee—René in his old age recalling memories of René in his youth, relating how he had “wept and believed,” and also how he had sighed, and loved, and lost, and found consolation in friendship—and all this in an atmosphere of incense and amid a murmur of approbation, and the awed acknowledgment that there never had been such a man before, and never would be such a man again!

He had still a dozen years or so to live; but they were painful, uneventful years on which there is no necessity to dwell. The visits which he paid to the Duchesse de Berry at Venice and to the Comte de Chambord in London need not detain us. Still less need we trouble to follow him in his wanderings in search of health to various watering-places. All that matters is that he and his wife and Madame Récamier were growing old together.

He still had “his hour” in Madame Récamier's apartment. Except when he was travelling, he knocked at her door daily at half-past one, and sat *tête-à-tête* with her till half-past two. No one—not even the

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worthy Ballanche—was admitted to disturb him. Then, at the end of his hour, the callers were announced. A rug was thrown over his knees to hide his increasing infirmities from the world; and he talked, and inhaled incense, and received homage as of old. That was his life—or all that was essential in it—day after day, month after month, year after year.

He suffered from gout; and the gout was presently to show symptoms hardly distinguishable from those of paralysis. The vigour of his intellect presently declined. He lost his interest in everything—in everything, at all events, except the one friendship to which he never ceased to cling. He ceased to write, or to read, or to concern himself with politics, and dwindled away into a mere shadow of his old triumphant self. We have a picture of him in those days from the pen of Maxime du Camp, who did not know him, but sometimes saw him wandering in the streets. He was, we read, “the very image of *ennui*—a man bowed down beneath the burden of an intolerable weariness.” He had boasted of his *ennui* in his youth; and the boasts, like curses, had come home to roost.

The time came when he could no longer climb the stairs at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, but had to be carried by two footmen from his carriage to Madame Récamier’s door, and thence wheeled into her apartment on an easy-chair that ran on castors. He thought that no one knew, and that his infirmities were hidden—there was a conspiracy to let him think so. The care taken of him was the more necessary because Madame Récamier herself was also failing, and, being nearly blind, sat in a darkened room, so that her visitors had



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much ado not to trip on the carpet and tumble among the furniture.

A few more months passed, and Chateaubriand, weakening further, could no longer leave his house ; and then it was Madame Récamier's turn, in spite of her infirmities, to visit him. That was the hour, Sainte-Beuve says, of Madame de Chateaubriand's triumph and revenge. She would not let them be alone, but sat through all their interviews and embarrassed them, exacting that penalty for fifty years' sublime infidelity and elaborately courteous neglect. In February 1847 she died ; and there are witnesses who declare that "the grief of Chateaubriand was profound." It may be that he missed her—for the habit even of onerous ties is sometimes strong ; and it may also be—but there are some secrets of the human soul into which it is better not to pry.

"There is nothing for me to do now," Chateaubriand wrote to one of his friends, "but to sit by the side of my grave, and wait. Presently I shall descend into it with a good heart, and set out for eternity, holding my crucifix in my hand."

None the less, however, the thought of spending his few remaining days alone oppressed him. He was free at last, as he had predicted to Hortense Allart that he would some day be ; but Hortense had long since passed out of his life, and it was not to her, but to Madame Récamier, that his thoughts now inevitably turned. He begged her to marry him ; but though she was devoted to him, she would not.

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"What would be the use of that?" she asked. "At our age propriety can have no word to say about the cares that I am giving you. If your loneliness troubles you, I am quite willing to come and live in the same house with you. The world, I am sure, will do justice to the purity of our friendship and approve of any step which makes it easier for me to crown your last years with peace and happiness and affection. If we were younger, I would not hesitate, but would accept with joy the right of consecrating my life to you. But my age and my blindness have given me that right already. We must do nothing to alter the character of such a perfect friendship."

She was right, and he allowed himself to be persuaded. His strength slipped from him by imperceptible degrees; and she sat by him with the slow tears dropping from her old blind eyes, and watched the ebbing of the tide.

There were moments—rare moments—when the failing flame flashed up, and the old vitality seemed to be reviving. He quoted the poets at such moments with something of the old rich intonation; and once he sent for his friends, and read them a few final extracts from his *Mémoires*. It was as if a dying man should sit up in bed to read his will.

That only happened once, however. He soon relapsed into taciturnity, and even into coma, hardly aware of the stormy events of February 1848, which sent his old enemy Louis-Philippe flying in ignominy from his kingdom, barely understanding when he was told that the French had got their republic at last; thinking only, in so far as he was capable of thought,

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of Madame Récamier ; praying only, in so far as he was capable of prayer, that he might die before her, and that she might be with him when he died.

They had both lived and loved, and each of them had many memories which the other did not share ; but the memories which they did share were the only memories which mattered. The rest was vanity and vexation of spirit ; but this friendship, which had stood the test of lapses and infidelities, was firm and real, and would endure. So they lived in it, forgiving and forgiven, as happy as the old and infirm and dying may be ; and the days dripped by until Chateaubriand's prayer was answered.

On July 2, 1848, he sent for the priests and "the paraphernalia of death," and "with profound sentiments of humility and faith" received the last sacraments of the Church. Then, two days later, he died in Madame Récamier's arms, without an effort or a struggle—so quietly and peacefully that she, unable to see him, sat on, holding his hand, not knowing that he was dead until they broke it to her and gave her blind eyes leave to weep for him.

THE END

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